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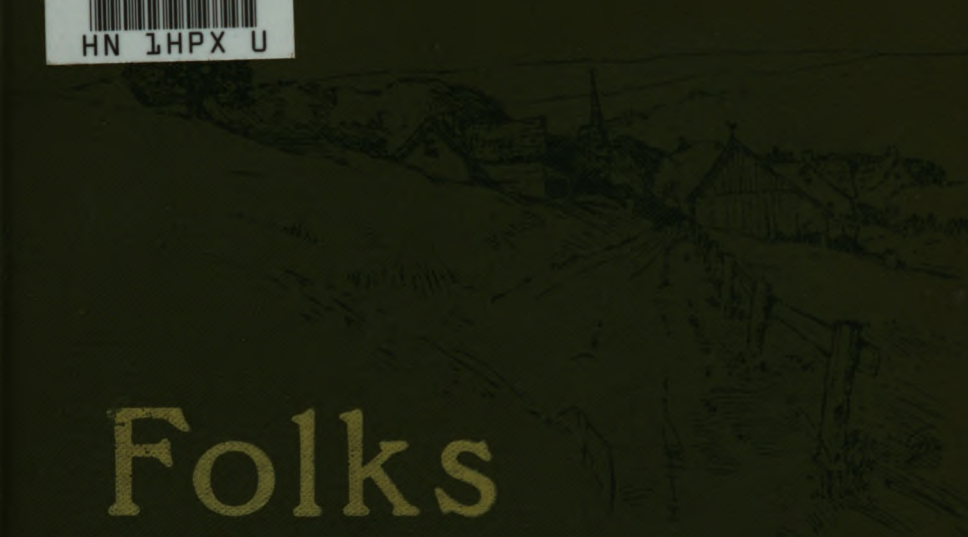

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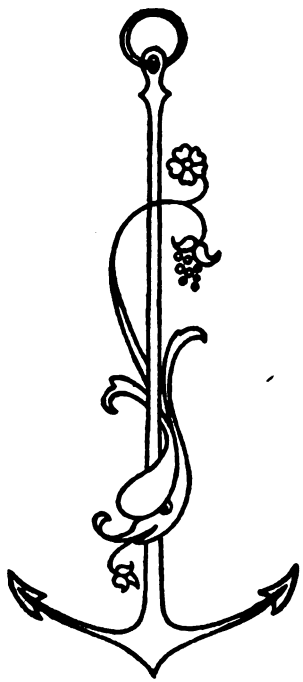

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To my most critical appreciator
To my most doubting admirer
The most thoroughgoing
Sentimentalist and Realist
To the one who has lost all illusions
save that I am the greatest of all
Living Writers
in short
To my Wife
This book is dedicated

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THE SEAL OF THE COVENANT

I

FOR a minute or two Mrs. Smith felt provoked that Mr. Burns should have called just when he did. She wasn't much of a hand to read; she couldn't seem to get her mind on it, she said, but she liked to have Clara read aloud, and they had got to the place where it looked as if She wasn't going to get Him after all. When Clara went into the parlor, Mrs. Smith laid down her Battenberg and read a few pages herself, but it kept looking more and more as if He would never see that She was just tantalizing Him and leading Him on. The next chapter began with: "But let us return to our young friends, Harry and George." Mrs. Smith did not care two pins about Harry and George. She hesitated a moment and then boldly turned over to the last chapter. Well, She got Him. It was quite a load off Mrs. Smith's mind, but she felt like a child that has peeped on Christmas eve. Her fun was spoiled now. Clara would want to finish the book and would notice that she wasn't interested. She would ask ques-

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tions. Clara despised to have people turn over to the last chapter.

Mrs. Smith began to think up things to say, and she had hardly got a good start when she heard the parlor door open and Mr. Burns come out into the hall. What, already? She heard him take his things from the hat-rack and put them on, helped by Clara. Both were very still. Usually they clattered away at a great rate, but to-night . . . She wondered what was up. She heard him ask something in a pleading voice. In the silence that followed Mrs. Smith clairvoyantly saw Clara shake her head. He sighed and said, " Good night," in a subdued and humble voice. Clara's "Good night" also betokened emotion. Then came the departing footsteps on the brick walk and the door shut.

Mrs. Smith wanted to jump right up and run to her daughter to ask all about it. But something kept her at her Battenberg. It seemed to take Clara a very long time to fix the parlor fire for the night and to straighten the room into its habitual decorum. When she came out and took a chair in the sitting room she seemed to have no more desire than her mother to resume the interrupted reading.

After waiting a reasonable time for Clara to speak, Mrs. Smith gave her Battenberg a turn on her lap and began: " Mr. Burns didn't make a long stay to-night."

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Clara held her peace.

With something like a sigh for glories now forever past, Mrs. Smith complained: "Young folks nowadays ain't what they was. In my time they didn't use to think nothin' at all o' settin' up till two three o'clock in the mornin' when they was sparkin' a girl, but now they ain't more'n good and got their hats off before it's, 'Well, I'll be goin' along.' It's no wonder they don't nobody get married any more hardly."

If this was intended to draw Clara out it failed of its purpose, but it did draw Mrs. Smith out.

"I mind one time when John Van Meter was courtin' me—that was before your pa's folks moved here from Clark County—John set up with me till plumb four o'clock Monday mornin'. Pap, he was always up and about at four, winter and summer. He'd set and read till it was light enough to see to do the chores. He come in and ast John if he wouldn't stay for breakfast. Well, sir, I thought John would sink through the floor. . . . He quit comin' after that. . . . Pap says, 'Won't you stay fer breakfast, Mr. Van Meter?' and John, he reached fer his hat and lit out, and not a word out o' him. I never seen him ag'in, except at meetin' and such places. . . . He was the poorest hand to carry on a conversation, John was. Two three times I prett' near went to sleep. I had a big wash to do

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that day, and not gittin' my rest jist about finished me. I went to bed right after I hung the clothes out and never waked up till time to set the table for supper. I always knowed after that how it was with that young couple over to Rum Creek. I told you about them, didn't I, Clara?"

Clara roused herself to ask: "What young couple?" Not that she was much interested though.

"W'y, he was settin' up with her in front of a open fireplace, and I guess he must 'a' ben another John Van Meter, fer they both went to sleep and fell over into the fire and was burned so bad before they was got out that the both of 'em died. She was burned worse'n he was. 'Course it's turrable to think o' folks burnin' up alive. That's one thing I got ag'inst the Catholics. But, still, it's kind o' comical, too, one way you look at it. I tell you what, they wasn't no noddin' and gapin' when your pa was around. He was a great cut-up. . . . John Van Meter was lots older'n me, anyways."

Mrs. Smith worked on in silence a little longer and attacked the subject again: "You didn't say nothin' to Mr. Burns to hurt his feelin's, did you? Because I know how you are, Clara. Whatever you think you blat right out. The men don't like a girl to be too outspoken. I sometimes think that's the reason why you don't get a man."

Clara stirred impatiently.

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"I don't know what's got into the young men nowadays. So little sense. Now see 'at Elnora Rhinehart, the humbliest bein' I think the Lord ever made, red hair and sandy complected, and as freckled as a turkey egg, and a big nose, and a mouth look like a whole double-handful o' horse teeth had jist ben shoved in anyways, and look how well she done! And here's you that's a reel good-lookin' girl, I won't say *pirty*, but *nice*-lookin', and *stylish*-lookin', and can make all her own things—Mrs. Perkypile wouldn't believe, the other day, but what your winter hat was trimmed by a reg'lar milliner—and you can play on the instrument some and reel well educated——"

"Oh, pshaw, mother!"

"'Aw, pshaw' nothin'! You are so. You got to be, a teacher in the High School like you are. And you get to go to socials and all like that where the men are, and I don't believe one of 'em has ever ast you, and here you are, twenty-eight, goin' on twenty-nine. Your pa used to say, 'Oh, they'll all be after her when she grows up,' but, my land! I don't believe you give 'em any encouragement whatsoever."

"Maybe I don't want to get married."

"W'y, Clara Smith!"

"That's my name, mum," said Clara, with a little quirk of the corners of her mouth.

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"Yes, and it's likely to be your name, too."

"Well, bein' as they's so many nice folks has got that name, I dassent say nothin' ag'in it," said Clara, with exaggerated dialect. "I jist as soon have that name as Snigglefritz. I don't know but sooner. It seems to be easier, anyhow, to keep what I have than to get another."

"Tchk! You're jist like your pa. You couldn't get him to talk seriously about anything."

"Well, ma'am, I'll talk seriously with you, if that's what you want. Why should I want to get married? You own this house, and I s'pose you'll let me live with you as long as I behave myself, and when you die (which I hope you won't till you get good and ready) I s'pose you'll will it to me, seeing that John's got his share and is doing so well out in Omaha. There's a roof over me all my days. I've got my place in the High School, and I guess I can keep it as long as I want to. They don't pay as much as they ought, but it's sure and it's enough to eat and wear for you and me, and a little over. It's work that I like to do, and the hours are from nine in the morning till four in the afternoon, quarter of an hour recess morning and afternoon, and an hour and a half for dinner. Saturdays and Sundays, the Christmas and Easter holidays, and the summer-time I'm free.

"Well, now. If I got married—that is, s'posin' I

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could, mum—I go to work for my board and clothes and maybe not that, if anything happens to *him*. If I want five cents I can't have it unless he is a mind to give it to me. That's nice! I'd like that! There's no vacation, and the hours are from the time you get up in the morning till you go to bed at night and no recess. I don't mind helping you with the housework, because it's a change, but it's not the work I like, and to be tied to it forever and eternally—No, ma'am, thank you. Not any for me."

"But s'posin' you got a man well enough off so's 'at you needn't do the housework yourself."

"Yes, and what should I be to such a man? Come, mother, look me in the eye and tell me what I should be?"

Mrs. Smith reddened and did not look her daughter in the eye.

"That's no way to talk, Clara," she reproved. "It isn't ladylike to say such things."

"What things?"

"What you jist now said."

"I didn't say anything. Neither did you. You were afraid to. But you thought it. And I tell you something else. The woman that 'marries for a home,' do you know what I think of her? I think she hasn't any cause to turn up her nose at Gentle Annie and the other trollops up in Stringtown."

There was silence, which Clara broke by: "And

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why should you be so anxious for me to get married? What would become of you if I did?"

"Oh, I'd get along all right!" This was said rather faintly.

"Oh, you'd do fine! Suppose he didn't want a mother-in-law about, wouldn't I be happy—wouldn't I be tickled to death to know that you were staying here nights all alone? Or maybe you would go out to Omaha and live with John and Inez."

Mrs. Smith winced at both suggestions.

"You know you and Iny couldn't get along together at all. It was as much as you could do to hold in when she and John were here on a visit last fall, and what would you do if you had to live in the house with her? Iny's well-meaning, but laws-a-my! it beats *me* to guess what John could ever see in her, and yet he thinks she's the finest woman that ever stepped. He'd take her part against you. He'd have to."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Smith, "the Scripture says for a man to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife. We dassent go agen Scripture, but I always thought it was a kind o' hard for the boy that she's tended to ever since he was born to take and leave her for some woman he's only knowed a little while, especially when they're slack housekeepers, and jist let them two little children go lookin' like distraction——"

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Mrs. Smith was on the point of crying when Clara interrupted with:

"Well, there's no Scripture commanding old maids to leave their poor lone mother to take up with the first slick-head that comes along."

"Now, Clara, you mustn't consider me," quavered Mrs. Smith. "I done my sheer. I bore the burden in the heat o' the day and now it's your turn and I ortn't to hender you. You've ben a awful good daughter to me, and you'll make some man a good wife, and it ain't right—it ain't natural fer you to say you don't want to git married."

"Who said I didn't want to get married?"

"W'y, you jist this very minute said how much nicer it would be fer you to go on teachin' school than to git married and have to do housework."

"So it would, but that isn't it. As far as getting a living is concerned, I'd be a fool to give up teaching at good wages and go as a servant for no wages at all. But getting a living isn't all there is to life. It's only half of it. If I were a sexless being, like the worker bees I was telling the children about this afternoon, I shouldn't think twice about whether I was an old maid or not. But I'm a woman, and a woman isn't all of a woman unless she's a mother!"

"I hope you didn't say that before Mr. Burns!"

"No, ma'am, I didn't. I was going to, but I thought I'd better not."

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"Clara Smith! You didn't *think* of saying it!"

"Huh! Do you reckon I've gone plumb crazy? Either he'd have been shocked into a faint or else— They're a low-minded lot, the best of 'em. But, mother," she declared, passionately, "I'm hungry for children of my own. When I go into Mrs. Power's room and see the little things there I could just eat 'em up, I love 'em so!"

"W'y, Clara!"

"Oh-o-o-oh!" she laughed, with a laugh that was half a moan, "I know it isn't respectable to talk about having children, and I don't know why, unless it is too holy, too sacred to be spoken of; but *you* can't reprove me. You're worse than I am. You've *had* 'em. Honest, now, ma, don't you wish you had grandchildren that you could pet and spoil and jaw with me about because I didn't do for them right?"

The girl's eyes glittered with emotion too intense for tears, but they instantly sprang into her mother's eyes. "I didn't git no good at all o' John's all the time he was here," she whimpered. "Iny jist watched 'em like a hawk, and begrutched me every minute I was with 'em. And it's jist tantalizin' to me to see their pictures and know 'at they're so fur away from me, and maybe their little underclothes is all ragged. When you get married, Clara, you'll let me be with your children, won't you?"

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"Yes—when I get married." There was a queer note in her voice.

Her mother hunted for a handkerchief. "I wish't you could get a man, Clara," she said, humbly.

"Well, maybe I could if I was to try right hard," said Clara, dryly. "Let's see, now, who'll be the lucky fellow? There's Henry Enright."

"Huh! You shan't take up with such trash as him if I've got anything to say about it."

"Well, then, there's Charley Pope."

"Charley'd be an awful nice boy if he didn't drink so. I wouldn't want you to have a drinking man."

"There's Frank Rodehaver."

"It ain't you he ought to be marryin'."

"No, from what I hear. Well, there's Charley De Wees."

"Yes, and he's a lazy, triflin' hound as ever walked."

"I suppose you'd object to Chet Miller because he forged his father's name, and Jim Detwiler because he's always stealing from his mother."

"Ain't it a pity! And the Detwilers so nice, too."

"Well, there's Bert Palmer. He doesn't drink or gamble or steal, and he isn't 'onry.'"

"No. He ain't got spunk enough to do anything. I don't believe he's reel bright."

"Well, ma'am, that's about all on this side the

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tracks that ain't bespoke. On the other side, there's Miky Ryan."

"The Ryans is Catholics. I wouldn't want you to marry a Catholic. . . . I don't know what's the matter with the young men. So footy and no-account. Stock's kind o' runnin' out, I guess."

"We've only the leavings in this town, mother. All the boys that amount to anything pick up and go away."

"Like Dick Wambaugh. You used to think a good deal o' him, didn't you? Full of ambition, my! Your pa thought a heap o' him. Where is he now?"

"Chicago. Or he was, last I heard."

"What ever made you quit correspondin' with him?"

"Oh, it kind o' dropped off. He owes me a letter now, let's see—three years and four months."

"I s'pose he seen some girl up in Chicago he liked."

"I reckon so."

"Be nice if you could 'a' got him. W'y, Clara!" Mrs. Smith suddenly recollected. "We forgot all about pore Mr. Burns. And he was here jist this evening. Wouldn't he do? He's educated and principal of the High School. He's got nice connections. The Burnses is well thought of in Mechanicsburg. He's reel nice in some ways. No bad habits nor nothing."

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"No," said Clara.

"Awful spindlin'-lookin', though, ain't he? Your pa was always so big and hearty till he was took down with typhoid pneumonia. I always liked these strong, hearty men."

"Yes," said Clara.

"Deliver me from these grunty men that's always achin' and ailin' and fussin' about draughts and catchin' cold. Miz Parker, where he boards, was goin' on about him the other day. She says he's a reg'ler old granny about things. There! That Battenberg's done at last. I'm goin' to have a piece o' bread and butter and go to bed. Did you hear about Corinne Snively? She's Mrs. Perkypile's cousin, and Mrs. Perkypile was invited up to her weddin' up to Radnor. She married Morgan Griffith, and they got a whole lot o' nice presents, Mrs. Perkypile said; pickle castor and two sets o' plated knives and forks, and I don't know what all. And amongst 'em was a pair o' lace curtains, Battenberg, all hand-made, every stitch. Mrs. Perkypile said they were the loveliest things she ever laid eyes on. But she said look like the burden laid on Corinne was greater'n she could bear, because her and Morg has got a big bow window to their front room, and one pair won't be enough, and other curtains wouldn't match, and if Corinne don't put 'em in her front windows so's folks goin' by can see 'em, the lady that give

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'em 'll think she don't appreciate 'em, and what to do she don't know, and the lady that give 'em said she wouldn't undertake a job like that again for a thousand dollars, even if she had the time, which she hasn't, because her brother's wife died not long ago, and she's takin' care of the children. We're 'most out o' butter. I must think to order some in the mornin'. He didn't make much of a stay to-night, did he? Well, what did Prunes, Prisms, and Pyramids have to say for himself?"

"Why, among other things," said Clara, tasting the humor of the situation, "among other things, he asked me if I'd marry him."

"W'y, Clara Smith! You set there and ca'mly tell me that!"

"Did you expect me to jump up and crack my heels together? Yessum, it's the pine-blank facts I'm a-tellin' you. Your daughter has had an offer of marriage."

The poor lady's jaw dropped with chagrin at the recollection of what she had just said about Mr. Burns and with astonishment that Clara had not told her sooner.

"And what did you say to him?"

"While you're up," said the young woman, with half-dropped eyelids and a fine affectation of calmness, "I wish you'd cut and spread me a piece, too.

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Put a little sugar on it, won't you? I believe I'd like it."

"Well, you are the funniest-actin' girl I ever saw. What did you tell him?"

"What would you want me to tell him?"

"W'y—w'y—I—I don't know."

"I didn't, either."

"Did you say that?"

"No. I said it was so sudden and—you know—and I'd like to have time to think it over. No. *He* said that. He said I might have time in which to consider it."

"You're goin' to take him, ain't you?"

"Would you?"

Mrs. Smith sank down into a chair.

"W'y—ah—" said she, and sat staring at nothing.

II

Mr. Burns was to come for his answer that night a week. Clara had that much time to think it over, or, rather, to talk it over with her mother. Between them they canvassed the advantages and disadvantages of the alliance, now one favoring it and now the other.

"Ain't it ridiculous?" snickered Clara once, after she had been repelling her mother's contention that Mr. Burns's complexion indicated that he might be

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liable to lung trouble. "A body'd think we were buying a horse and wanted him warranted sound in wind and limb, gentle and broke to double harness. If I ought to take him, why, I'd want him so bad I'd be like that girl you were telling me about, oh, what's her name? You know."

"What girl?"

"Why, that girl when the fellow asked her if she'd marry him and she squalled out: 'W'y, ye-e-es, and jump at the chance!' You know."

"Oh, Priscill. Strayer. I wouldn't want you to be like her. But you must consider, Clara," turning right around to the fervent advocacy of Mr. Burns when Clara attacked him, "it isn't every girl has a chance to get as good a man. Now, where are they a nicer one in this town than him? So refined and——"

"Always wears his rubbers and shuts the door softly and——"

"Hush up when I'm talkin' to you. And though he ain't a member of any church, he's a moral man, and I believe he's a good man, and he orta make you a good husband."

"Yes, but will he?"

"Well, that they can't nobody tell till they've tried. Men is funny creatures."

"Well, I guess I won't try."

"Why not?"

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"I don't like him well enough."

"Aw, now, yes, you do. You jist a little while ago said he was good company and could carry on a conversation lovely about Emerson and literatoor and all like that. You said you liked him reel well."

"That isn't it. I don't—isn't it funny how we hate to say the word?—I don't *love* him."

"Aw, well, now, Clara, that's foolishness. This thing o' bein' crazy after a fellow, like they are in the novels, is kind o' green, I think. It don't last no time. A girl got to be your age she don't git carried away with that. You like him, and you'll like him better when you git used to him."

"Maybe."

"And another thing. He's the principal of the High School and, if you didn't take him, he could make it mighty unpleasant for you."

"Now, Ma Smith, that *does* settle it. I wouldn't have him after that if he was the last man on earth. I've got as many friends on the school board as he has, I guess, and if he tries to come any of his shenannigan on me, he'll find out a thing or two, I shouldn't wonder."

Mrs. Smith saw her mistake in a minute, and after that Mr. Burns never got a good word from her. As for the married state, it was an affliction too grievous to be borne and children—children were a terrible care. A body was just plumb worried out

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of their mind, what with scarlet fever and mumps and chicken pox, and falling down on knives and hatchets, and stepping on broken glass and getting the lockjaw from it. John had her scared half to death all the time when he was little.

"You got to walk softly with Clara," she told herself. "Her pa used to call her 'Paddy's pig,' she was so contrairy. He said she was jist fer all the world like that pig that they got to Dublin only by makin' him think he was goin' to Cork. She was as fat as butter then, anyhow."

As a result, when Mr. Burns called on the fateful evening, Clara dodged into the sitting room from the front window and whispered hoarsely, "Here he is now. Do, for mercy's sake, tell me what to say to him."

"Well, Clara, all I got to say is: If you don't like him, don't have him."

"Well, I do kind o' like him."

"You want to be right shore now."

"I guess I won't."

"All right. Suit yourself. They's plenty men in the world."

"It seems so kind o' mean to snap him off with 'No,'" Clara mused, and then the loud clang of the doorbell gong exploded. "Good land!" she scolded, "I wish I'd told him 'No,' in the first place."

Mrs. Smith did not exactly listen at the keyhole,

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but she made no more noise sitting still than was necessary. She tried to forecast the result. It was a funny kind of doings, Mrs. Smith thought. It wasn't that way in her young days.

Mr. Burns stayed considerably later this time, but as the week before, in the hall, just as he departed, he preferred a request in a low tone of voice, and as before Mrs. Smith clairvoyantly saw Clara shake her head in refusal. He did not persist.

"Well?" said Clara, half defiantly, when she returned to the room and met her mother's interrogating glance.

"Well?"

"Well—ah—" Clara started to relate, and then broke off to titter: "Strikes me that for so many 'wells' the conversation's pretty dry."

This was too much.

"Behave yourself. You're actin' flighty. I want you to quit your foolin' and tell me what you said to that man."

"Well, sir, ma, I fully intended as much as anything to tell 'that man,' as you call him, that while I appreciated his kind offer and so forth and so forth, he'd have to excuse me because I didn't like him well enough. But when I saw him standing there looking so pleading and yet not 'meechin',' either.—He's got awful pretty eyes. Did you ever notice them, mother?—Well, sir, I just couldn't. Now. And when

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he got to talking and said it would ruin his life if I wasn't a part of it, I felt like a sheep-killing dog to think that was just what I meant to do. You know what an influence for good a woman can be in a man's life, and I wouldn't want to take the responsibility of completely spoiling his whole career. If he'd got soft or sickening, I'd have turned against him right then and there, but he didn't. And yet for all he was dignified about it, I could see that he was—er . . ." The sentence faded out unfinished.

"You think he likes you reel well?"

"Yes. I'm sure he does. Yes, I know he does. He's very nice," she sighed, softly.

"You think you like him?"

"Yes, I don't know but I do."

"As well as if it had been Dick Wambaugh?"

Clara shot a glance at her mother, but said nothing. She divined a certain feminine jealousy in her that another woman, though her daughter, had found favor in the sight of a man. There may have been some of that left over from youth, but Mrs. Smith was then experiencing the disappointment that attends the success of one's plans. She had wanted Clara to accept Mr. Burns, and now that he was safely landed he seemed a poor thing. The Widow Parker had said he was a regular old granny. He looked as if he might be. He was "kind o' dili-

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cate," too. Mr. Smith had been so hearty. And he was so precise about his speech. He said "knaife" and "laife" so staccato, so neatly. She sighed.

"I hope you done wisely, Clara," she grieved.

"You think I haven't?" was Clara's quick retort.

"No, oh, no. Not at all. I wouldn't say that—exactly. He's a very nice man in his way, no doubt, but still——"

"But still what?"

"Well, of course, if the men won't ask you, w'y, you can't have 'em. If you think he ain't a-goin' to be consumpted, w'y all right. I don't say but what he's as good as you can do, all things considered. Now, it's you that's got to be suited, not me, Clara. Only——"

"Well?" Clara was growing irritated.

"Well, if it was me, I think I'd ruther have a man that was more hearty-like, and (I s'pose it's jist a prejudice), but I've always thought it wasn't a man's place to teach school."

"Oh, now, mother!" Clara was on her high horse in an instant. Her beloved profession was one worthy of the highest capacities and endeavors.

"Yes," said Mrs. Smith, when Clara had ended her tirade. "Yes, I s'pose that's all so, but I think a *man* had orta be in better business."

"Look at you, mother!" stormed Clara. "You were ding-donging at me night and day to take him,

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and now that I have taken him you turn right around and run him down."

"I didn't, either, run him down. I was only tellin' you."

"Well, isn't what you said running him down?"

"No. I was thinkin', though——"

"What were you thinking? Let's have it."

"I don't want you to talk to me in that sassy way, Clara Smith. It ain't pretty of you. Your mother knows what's best fer you. Now listen here. You got to consider everything, and now's the time to do it."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. S'posin' you'd 'a' said 'No' to him and he'd 'a' went away and you'd 'a' found out you liked him, w'y, you'd 'a' felt mighty flat, I guess, to not git him. You're sure of him now, and s'posin' you find out he isn't as nice as you think he is, and somebody comes along 'at you like better, w'y, you can back out any time you want to, don't you see?"

"Why, Mother Smith! After I've given him my word, after I have promised him!"

"Oh, well, now, it don't do to be so particular about your word—especially in a case like this," was Mrs. Smith's calm reply.

"Well, of all things! And you holding up my father to me because he was a man of the strictest honor in all his dealings. And I've always been so

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proud when people told me that Abner Smith's word was as good as anybody's bond!"

"He was a man, Clara, and that's very different. Come, now, you've set up long enough. It's time to go to bed."

III

Winter was loath to let go that year, and so, though they had done some work in the unusually mild January on the new trolley line that Abel Horn had been instrumental in getting for Minuca Center, the ground stayed so hard that it was not until the first of April that the pick-and-shovel Italians made their appearance. Even then there were many days of wretched weather when they were compelled to stay in the shanty on Mumma's lot, where they ate and slept. The men that laid the rails and made the connections were paid by the month, and took things more philosophically than the pick-and-shovel men that were paid only by day's work.

Minuca Center, all of a twitter because of the trolley line which was to connect it with Mt. Victory and Pharisburg and, after a while, with Columbus itself, was thrilled to hear that there was a strike on. The first impressions of the Italians had not been very favorable. Uncle Billy Nicholson went about portending dire calamities to the nation that ad-

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mitted foreigners to take the jobs away from native-born Americans. What avail was it to have a tariff against the goods made by the pauper labor of Europe when the pauper labor itself came right over here, feet, feathers, and all? Yes, and they let 'em vote after they had been here a while, though they were Catholics and Democrats—same thing—and wanted the Pope to get control of the government. The children mocked the "dagoes," as they called them, and hallooed at them, "Matchicodatchicobabble-a-ba-a-a-a!" sagging down the scale on the final vowel in imitation of the descendants of Cæsar's legionaries.

"You stop that this instant!" their mothers cried. "Don't you ever say that again. You don't know what kind o' naughtiness it might be."

Fear followed hard after. People fastened their front door when they went to bed and put a chair against the kitchen door. They hid their wheelbarrows and gardening tools. They even took in their washings nights, a thing unheard of before. For Mrs. Perkypile had found one of the Italians taking things off her line, right—off—the—*line*! And she had to hit him with the clothes-prop before he would go away. It was awful to see her bug her eyes out when she told about it, and to hear her hoarse reproduction of his, "Me-a kill-a you!"

But when the strike came it was felt that there

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was some good in them. Perhaps they might be men and brethren, after all, for they had rebelled against the oppression of a conscienceless corporation, and had said they wouldn't do a tap of work unless they too were paid by the month, so that they would not lose money when it rained.

"Them dagoes had got the spirit o' '76 in 'em all right," declared Clarence Bowersox to his employer, Otto Littell.

"Yes," the grocer assented, a little gingerly, thinking to himself that he paid the boy all he was worth, anyhow. Then the American in him got the upper hand of the employer. "I jox!" he said, "it don't look right, now, does it, makin' discriminations that-a-way? Well, sir, I glory in their spunk. I hope they'll win. 'Course, it keeps the streets all mussed up, but they's no great loss without some small gain. Cantrell, the foreman, he boards 'em, and he buys quite a bill o' goods o' me. He says he'd put 'em out while they're strikin', only he's a-scared to. He says they wouldn't think no more o' stickin' a knife into him if he tried to put 'em out the shanty than nothin' at all. I jox! Ain't that turrable?"

"Aw, well, Cantrell!" sneered Clarence. "I got my opinion o' Cantrell. The chief ingineer's comin' to-day."

"What's his name?"

"Danged if I know. Comes from Chicago.

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Drawed all the plans and specifications. Come on to see how things is a-gittin' along."

"I jox! Wonder how he'll like it to find there's a strike."

Clara Smith and Mr. Burns were out walking that afternoon and strayed over by the lot where the Italians were loafing and dozing in the sunshine waiting for a decision of the strike. Mr. Burns was talking about whether it would be better to have the clay modeling class transferred to the afternoon session or left as it was in the morning session. It was very difficult for him to come to a decision in a matter so complex. Clara tried to help him, but as soon as she advanced an argument in support of his position he shifted position with, "But, on the other hand, Miss Smith." She felt vaguely discontented when her attention was drawn to a buggy that drove up to the lot with two men in it. One leaped out and walked over to the shanty with such a businesslike, masterful stride that she stopped to look. Mr. Burns's academic murmur was broken into by the stranger's snappy: "Here! why aren't you men at work? Get busy, get busy! *Lavore!*"

A big Italian lifted his eyebrow, took his pipe out of his mouth, and said something she couldn't make out. The brusque answer came: "You weren't hired by the month but by the day. You understood that before you took on. . . . No. No. . . . If you don't

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like it, get to hell out of here. Jump now. . . . Railroad fare? Not on your life. You *walk* back if you break your contract. Now, either get to work or get out. . . . Oh, sure. Talk it over with the others. Give you five minutes." He looked at his watch, snapped it shut, and strolled easily toward the buggy.

"Why, I know him," cried Clara. "That's Dick Wambaugh!"

His name alone carried the distance, and the stranger quickly turned to see who had spoken it. He came to her instantly, his hat off, his hand outstretched.

"Clara Smith!" he said. "Or is it?" He glanced at her companion.

"Yes," she laughed nervously, flushing a little. "Still Clara Smith. Mr. Wambaugh, let me present Mr. Burns, the principal of the High School."

She did not add: "The gentleman I have engaged myself to marry." Be sure that of the two men it was not Dick Wambaugh that noted the omission.

"And what brings you here?" she asked, wishing that instead she might make as pointed a query of him as he had made of her.

He explained, and they were in the full flood of chatter when the Italian to whom he had spoken approached. "Excuse me," said Dick, and went to meet the man. Clara saw him lean over to catch the

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man's first low words, and then his face darkened and hardened as the workman, emboldened, poured forth a torrent of words.

"What's that? Say that again. Oho! So that's the milk within the cocoanut. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . He did, eh? Why didn't you? . . . Why didn't you tell him? . . . Now, listen. You tell the men that there won't be any more of that. The company wouldn't have stood for it for a minute if it had known. You go back to work, understand? What? Cantrell takes his orders from me. I'm in charge now. Yes. Get to work. *Pronto.* Hustle now, and you'll get a full day's pay for to-day."

Returning to Clara, he said: "Poor devils! They've been robbed right and left, and didn't know how else to get redress. Well, how's all with you? How's your mother? Has she ever forgiven me for stealing those pumpkin pies she set out to cool? Going to be home this evening? Tell your mother I'm coming up to see her. You, too. You'll excuse me, won't you? I see the men are going to work. See you to-night, Clara. Good-by, Mr.—Mr. Burns, yes. Pleased to meet you."

Clara walked away, the smile of parting still lingering on her face and warming her to the bone. She came to herself to hear Mr. Burns say: "And not only the matter of calling you by your first name. I do not wish to seem exacting, Miss Smith,

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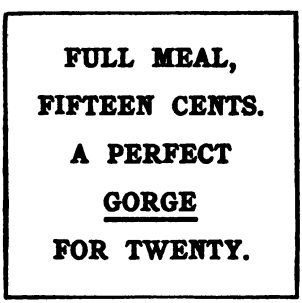
but I do think you should have intimated to Mr.—Mister—rah—Mr. Wambaugh that you were my affianced, and—ah—so, not at liberty to receive gentlemen callers without in some sort receiving my permission."

"Aw, fudge!" said Clara. "Dick Wambaugh used to sit behind me in school and pull the ribbons off my hair."

They had a famous time that evening, Dick and Clara and her mother, gabbling away with, "Do you remember?" and "Don't you mind?" and "What's become of?" until Dick got to telling of his experiences trying to get a footing in Chicago; what hard times he went through, and how once when he was absolutely without a cent and hungry, he found a quarter on the street and spent it in that restaurant in West Madison Street that had the sign out:



They listened with lips parted and eyes that shone as he told, what is the only story worth telling, the

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story of struggle and unsatisfied ambition. Once or twice the tears came into the women's eyes. It was tragedy to them, but the man smiled to recall the experience. At the end when they smiled at the happy *dénouement* he was saddened. Success? There is no such thing. So much more remains to be achieved. Their hearts burned within them as it became real before them, this active, energetic life that accomplishes things for which Minuca Center were too cramping a field.

Clara drew a long breath. She dared not look at her mother, whose eyes continually awaited her.

All at once Dick spoke up brusquely: "How about those pumpkin pies, Mrs. Smith?"

"Dick Wambaugh! If you ain't the beatin'est boy that ever was! How'd you know I cut up my last pumpkin for pies and baked this very day?"

"Oh, I mean those I stole?"

"Well, I mean those I jist baked. Now you set still and I'll run and cut one."

When she had gone, "Clara," he said, fastening his eyes upon her, "I owe you a letter. Do you know that?"

"Why, yes, I believe you do," she said, as flutteringly as any schoolgirl.

"Do you know why I never wrote it?"

The words should never have made her blush and look down. The tone did.

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"It was because I had something to say to you that I couldn't write. I know, because I tried a thousand times and tore up all the letters. At first I wasn't in a position financially, and, after that, I didn't write letters, I dictated them. This was something I couldn't dictate. Always I meant to come to you and say it by word of mouth. I am ashamed to own that I have been too busy. But there is something more in life than business. Getting a living is only half of life."

She looked up at him. He had thought, then, the same thoughts that she had.

"But all the time, busy or not, at the back of my mind you stood. It was like the subconscious self the psychologists talk about. Have I been in your mind like that?"

A wave of blood drowned the pulse of her heart and choked her voice. Her lips and breath formed: "Yes."

"I love you, Clara," he said. "I want you to be my wife. Will you?"

All else was forgot, all but the overtowering fact that the man she had always loved and longed for had told her that he loved and longed for her. She looked up into his face. She could only wave her head in solemn affirmation.

He kissed her.

"Well, Dick, here's your p— Oh, ex*cuse* me!"

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Mrs. Smith told Clara afterwards she thought she should sink through the floor. She staggered to a chair and sat down. When Dick had made an end of speaking she stood the pie knife on the pie plate and viewed its point judicially as she said: "Well, Mr. Wambaugh, as far as I am concerned, you know I think the world and all of you and always did, and as far as Clara's concerned, I don't know but what it'll be all right, but they's a gentleman that—ah—calls—ah—occasionally—that—ah——"

Dick looked at Clara.

"Mr. Burns," she said, and went crimson. "I introduced him to you this afternoon."

"Oh, that? What's the Human Clothes-prop got to say about it?"

"Why, you didn't ever write, you know," Clara half wept, "and——"

"And I don't know what he'll think about it," pursued Mrs. Smith. "He considers that him and Clara is engaged."

"Well, I don't. Now!" declared Clara, defiantly. "He wanted me to kiss him, but I wouldn't. Oh, Dick! I've always loved you, and I just felt awful when you stopped writing, and I was going to write to you anyhow, only I was afraid you'd think I was too bold, and I didn't know where to direct it because you said you were going to move, and— Oh,

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what am I going to do about it? Mother, tell me what to do."

"Well, Clara, you must decide for yourself."

"Well, if it comes to that— Dick, as true as I live, I never let him or anybody else ever kiss me! Honest, I didn't! Only you."

"You regard the kiss as binding the bargain?" he asked, quizzically.

"Well, kind o'."

"The Seal of the Covenant, eh? You witnessed me kiss your daughter, ma'am?"

"Well—ah——"

"Oh, if there's any doubt about it—" The doubt was removed. "And once more. This time to bind me."

!

(That ought to express it, if type can.)

Some in Minuca Center thought poor Mr. Burns had been treated shamefully. Others—among them Sarepta Downey—said: "She done jist right. It's different with a woman about keepin' your word. 'Specially in a case like that. *He* didn't lose no time, did he?"

The following dialogue explains itself:

"Dicky, mamma told you twice to let that alone. This time I'm going to give you a good smacking. See if you can remember that."

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"Now, Clara, now, now, that's no way to do. Dicky didn't mean any harm, did you, Dicky? No, o' course not. You come upstairs with grandma and see what she's got for you."

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THE LOST DAY

I DECLARE, I feel right sorry for the pore boy," said Sarepta Downey, as she held aside her front-room window shade so that she might look out upon the agony of Garfield Lincoln McKinnon, doing such penance in the streets of Minuca Center as made the sufferings of his martyred namesakes seem no more than growing pains.

With Indian cruelty a lot of children had gathered about the boy as he minded the team outside Galbraith's store while his parents did their "trading." The malicious youngsters were gleefully chanting to the traditional melody:

Passers-by turned to look and spoke to each other, and the lad could see them say: "Oh, that's McKinnon's boy, is it?"

It is surely enough misery merely to be looked at when one has reached the age when his Adam's apple

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sticks out in his throat and wabbles up and down as his voice vacillates between treble and bass; when one blushes at the indecent haste of his wrists to grow out from under the cover of his sun-faded coat, and the two clerks, with noses like a figure 6, lounging in the doorway of Morgenroth's New York One Price Clothing House, make loud comments like, "Geth onta da high-vater pence!" but to be jeered at in the sight of all the town for what was not a fault, and even if it were, was not *his* fault, seemed to Garfield Lincoln McKinnon more than he ought to be made to endure. Yet he must endure it. But this was the last time. He was going away—didn't they wish they knew where?—and when he came back he would show them!

Indeed they did wish they knew. Every man, woman, and child in Minuca Center was gnawed with anxiety to learn where Alanson McKinnon, his wife, and son were going, and when they were coming back. That they were coming back was certain. All could guess pretty well why they were going. It was to escape the persecution of John Mumma. But why were they coming back? John Mumma would be eager to renew his harassing the very next Sunday after McKinnon's return, and if not John, then some other one of the Mumma tribe, just as keen to take up the old feud.

They had all tried to wheedle it out of Alanson

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McKinnon, but he had bluntly bade them mind their own business, if they had any. Mrs. McKinnon had bridled and smiled, and dropped her eyelids, and doddered her head while she answered that "she didn't know as she had orta say; they better ask Mr. Mac." And when this very Sarepta Downey had lavished her autumnal blandishments upon Garfy, he hung his head and scratched one foot with the other and gulped his Adam's apple up and down and said —not a word. "Acted like a perfect fool," she said, with asperity, afterwards.

The limelight of publicity had shone on the McKinnons for a long time, and that made the mystery all the more irritating to the people of the Center. Alanson McKinnon had interested them much. He was a church all by himself, the last remaining fragment of the sect of the Baileyites, or "Searchers," as they preferred to be called after their favorite text: "Search the Scriptures." The founder, the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey, had been put out of the Mt. Victory Presbytery for refusing to hold meeting on Sunday. He said it was nothing less than rank idolatry, thus to honor the Sun by keeping his day holy, and also defiance of the Almighty whose express command was to observe the seventh. Starting out for himself on this line, the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey had gathered together a congregation, to whose membership he was heartily welcome, as far as the other

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pastors were concerned. There was Marinus Moran who wanted to boss every church he had ever joined, and who could make more trouble than three choirs. There was "Tepe" Armstrong, who proved everything by quotations from the works of his illustrious namesake, Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian; Uncle Billy Roebuck, who said he saw visions; Zimri Hollabaugh, who spoke by the hour in "tongues" that nobody could understand, and who would not be shut off for any sake; Aunt Betty Moore, who could out-talk him and had been led out of more than one church, and not always quietly. There were four or five more of the same sort, and last of all came Alanson McKinnon. He was chiefly noted for being more "sot in his ways" than any other man in Logan County.

It was a queer congregation and a queerer pastor, for toward the last he became convinced that he was the seventh angel with the seventh trumpet, and went around climbing up on barns and smoke-houses to blow a long tin horn, until the constable came and took him to the county house.

After that the "Searchers" were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd, all except Alanson McKinnon, who was really the only convert of the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey's making. He held fast to the name and the one doctrine that he had managed to get clearly into his head, that the seventh day was the

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Sabbath. He and his never set foot inside other churches, but Alanson conducted a sort of service in their front room, and passed a dull Saturday in the strictest Sabbatical observance. At the first he gloried in his oddity, and he and Garfy used to work in the fields as close to the big road as they could get on a Sunday when the neighbors were going to meeting. It mortified Garfy to death to be seen working in his old duds when the other boys were all dressed up in store clothes; but the greatest cross of all was laid upon his mother. Alanson made her ring the bell for dinner just the same as if it was a common day. Every time she went out to the pole set in the ground close to the well and pulled the bell rope, she got red in the face. It seemed to her that she could see the whole countryside stop and hearken, and that she could hear them say to one another: "That's Nancy McKinnon callin' her man in from work on Sunday."

If anybody said to Alanson, "I s'pose it's all right to keep Saddy for Sabbath if you want to, but why can't you keep Sunday, too, luck the rest of us?" he had an answer ready: "I got Scripter for it. 'Six days *shelt* thou labor,' the book says."

"But it's agin the law of the land."

"'Tain't agin the law of the Lord," said Alanson, and after that the man would generally drive on.

But being a living epistle, known and read of all

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men, lost its attractiveness when John Mumma discovered that he had at last an opportunity to get revenge for the land lost when the referees went against him in the boundary-line dispute.

One Sunday morning just as all the folk were going to meeting, and Alanson was out in the field as large as life hoeing potatoes, up came Mumma and Billy Belt, the constable, who arrested him for performing servile labor on the first day of the week, commonly called Sunday. He was fined three dollars and costs. Next Sunday it was the same thing, and so it continued. McKinnon determined to work on Sunday and Mumma determined to have him arrested if he did. There was one good thing about this: Nancy McKinnon no longer had to ring the dinner bell, for Alanson hid his work and went to it with all possible concealment. But the Mummas didn't have "Injun blood" in them for nothing, and one or another of them always found him out.

Thus it was evident to all that the McKinnons were going away to get shut of all this. But why come back to enter again the furnace of affliction? This was what disturbed the inquiring minds of the people of Minuca Center.

Alanson had discovered a way out. A door had been opened for him in a quarter least expected. In the early days of his adhesion to the sect of the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey, he had been set upon by the ortho-

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dox and badgered into argument. In giving a reason for the faith that was in him, he had had so decidedly the best of it that he tasted the fierce joys of controversy, and after that he went up and down seeking them, as in his younger and unregenerate days he had looked for a fight. One day he made up his mind to attack old Dr. Cooper. From a tactical point of view, this was an error. All Alanson's previous victories had been won by flinging texts of Scripture at men that recognized them as weighty missiles and behaved accordingly. But Dr. Cooper, like Gallio, "cared for none of these things." He was an infidel and a spiritualist. His wife wore calico trousers to her shoe tops, and skirts to her knees, devised in an age that knew not bicycles. Her hair was short and her "medium controls" were "Cyrus the Great," and "Little Snowdrop," the disembodied spirit of an Indian girl, that spoke partly in baby talk and partly in something like an Englishman's notion of negro dialect. When traveling mediums came to Minuca Center they always stopped at the Coopers'. The fame of the mighty works they did was spread far and wide, and children that had to go by the house after nine o'clock at night walked on the other side of the street.

Dr. Cooper jumped at the chance for a debate. He, too, was born in Arcadia. Blandly waving aside all the familiar texts, he took his stand on natural

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philosophy. He maintained that there couldn't be one day in the week that should be kept holy, because while it was Saturday here, it was Sunday on the other side of the world. He explained that somewhere in the Pacific there was an imaginary line where the day began. If you sailed around the earth keeping Sunday, when you got back to your starting point you would find the folks keeping Sunday on your Saturday, or your Monday, according to which way you went; providing, of course, that you did not follow the common practice of adding or dropping a day to keep on good terms with the calendar.

Alanson sat so still that the doctor thought he had made a convert. Never was man more mistaken. It was all news to McKinnon, and he came and came again, getting Dr. Cooper to go over the same argument each time. One day he asked, for he was not quick on the uptake: "You're sure that if a man was to sail East around the world, a-keepin' the seventh day as the Sabbath and still a-stickin' to it, regardless of other folks' a-munkin' with the days of the week, when he got back, he'd still be a-keepin' the Sabbath and they'd be a-keepin' Sunday?"

Dr. Cooper was so constituted as to be certain of everything that he said, and able to disprove anything that anybody else said. He affirmed that his statement was absolutely correct and could be

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proved by the globe. Alanson rose with a smile on his face and thereafter came no more. Next day the old doctor was disturbed by an impression that he wanted to see McKinnon about something. But he was getting old and forgetful, and it passed out of his mind.

Alanson had once heard the Sabbath called "the Pearl of Days," and so that night, when at family prayers, he lighted upon the parable of the merchant that found the pearl of great price and sold all that he had and went and bought it, the tears came, and his voice quavered and broke. Without doubt what he had been thinking of was a "leading." The drowsing Garfield Lincoln opened his eyes with astonishment, but he widened them still more when his father shut the book and told what was in his heart to do. They were not done stretching with amaze three weeks later, when the *Eastern Emperor*, a British tramp steamer with a mixed cargo in its hold for Hongkong and Manila, steamed past Sandy Hook with Garfield Lincoln McKinnon on board, articled as cabin boy, his mother as cook, and his father rendering such assistance as a strong, active, and willing man can who has never seen salt water before.

. . . . . .

For many months Minuca Center had ceased to excite itself about the McKinnons and their where-

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abouts. War bulletins were its meat and drink now. There was hardly anybody at the station when Alanson, his wife, and Garfy got off the 12.55 train from the West. They walked up Main Street, which was all aflap with American flags and another kind that looked like a piece of cranberry pie on blue-and-white bed ticking. Across the street hung a banner bearing this device:

REMEMBER THE MAINE
THING IS TO BUY YOUR
GROCERIES AT CAMPBELLS.
Highest Prices Paid for Country Produce.

Some few of the populace rushed upon them with outstretched hands and remarked how well they were looking. Alanson seemed strangely diffident.

"W'y whur y'all be'n f'r so long?" asked Henry Peters.

"Travelin'," said Alanson shortly, and made as if to move on.

"That so? Whur to?"

"Oh, all 'round," which was strictly true, but hardly informative.

As they passed on, who should meet them but old Dr. Cooper. McKinnon apparently did not see him, but the doctor called out:

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"Alanson! Look here a minute. I must have missed you every time you come to town here lately. I been a-meanin' to tell you that I was wrong about sailin' around the world from East to West——"

"Yes," said Alanson, not giving him a chance to finish the sentence, "I have sence found out you was," and passed on with so chill an air that the old man did not know what to make of it.

Garfy was a changed boy from what he was when last the Center saw him. He who had been so painfully bashful, now looked at the girls with a conquering eye. The misses, that aforetime had tittered at his embarrassment when they teased him, felt a flutter under their organdie waists as his gaze followed them from under Campbell's awning where he was being quizzed by the boys.

"Whur all you be'n, Garfy?"

"Oh, jist around the world," says Garfy, nonchalantly putting out the tip of his tongue and squinting up his eyes as if to look at something far away.

"Jeeminently!" chorused the others, their eyes sticking out in amaze.

Then doubt arose.

"Yes, you have. Like hen!"

"Oh, all right. Whurj s'pose I got these?" He pulled out a handful of curiously carved nuts.

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"These I bought in Hongkong and these here is from Manila."

"Oh, was you to Manila?"

"Well, I guess yes."

All were silent, stunned by the presence of a great truth. Then spoke up "Turkey-egg" McLaughlin:

"Whadge go fur?"

Garfy spat a very small drop and brushed an imaginary shading of dust from his leg before he answered:

"Pap's idy," he said. "He was jist bound and determined to keep Saddy for Sabbath and work Sunday. Doc Cooper told him if he'd sail 'round the world to the east'ard he'd git back here still a-keepin' Saddy whilst you was a-keepin' Sunday. So he done it. Mumma persecuted him so."

"Mumma's dead," piped in little "Bunt" Rogers. "Be'n dead 'bout a month now. Horse kicked him."

"Well, he orta die," replied the unfeeling Garfy. "Anybody act the way he did. Well's I was goin' to tell you, we'd jist got into Manila Bay one night and was anchored out waitin' for mornin'. The skipper——"

"The what?"

"The skipper. The old man."

"Oh, your daddy."

"Naw. The captain. Cap'un Prunk his name was.

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Look here, if you country jakes is a-goin' to put in your oar all the time, I won't tell you a doggone thing."

The boys exchanged a frightened and awed look. Was this really Garfy?

"We was a-layin' there and Cap'n Prunk come and shook me. 'Tumble out, boy,' he says, all excited. 'Tumble out and go run and tell your daddy to come aft,' he says. 'Got somepin to show him.' Pap come and the old man give him his spyglass. 'There, you Yankee,' he says, 'tell me if that ain't nice.' Pap started to say, 'I ain't no Yankee,' and all of a sudden he began to holler. He got shoutin' happy. 'Glory!' he says, 'it's our ships and they're a-goin' to pitch right into them Spanishers over yan,' he says.

"'Right you are,' says the skipper, 'and they ain't a-goin' to wait till Monday, either.' Pap looked at him kind o' funny and says, 'Monday?'

"'Yes,' says the skipper. 'To-day's Sunday. We gotta drop a day, you know,' he says. You'd a thought it was pap that dropped, he looked so flabbergasted. But pretty soon we seen somepin white squirt out of the side of one o' our ships and then I heard somepin go 'Bump!' like you was kickin' on the door of an empty room, and then, 'Ar-r-r-r!' like a coffee mill, and then, 'Ker-boong!' Shell a-bustin'."

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Garfy made a rhetorical pause in order to let his weighty words sink in.

"Bunty" Rogers seized the opportunity. "I was to C'lumbus on the Fourth," he shrilled, "an' I heard 'em shoot off a cannon. Oo-oh, wasn't it loud? A real cannon it was, like they use to the war."

"Huh!" sneered Garfy, "one o' these here little footy fieldpieces. I've seen 'em. What I'm a-talkin' about is these here great guns, long's from here acrost the road. They don't shoot no cannon balls. They've got great, big, long steel things that they shoot out of 'em. Tall's you are and shaped like a cigar. The Spaniards was layin' over by Cavité. S'posin' this was Cavité." Garfy laid out his war map on the gravel walk. "They come right back at old Dewey, and I jis' tell you things was a-poppin' around there. Look luck pap he had the dumps for a spell, but 'twa'n't long 'fore he was a-whoopin' an' a-hollerin' luck a crazy man. One o' these here little torpedo boats come a-scootin' out to blow up our ships an' pap yelled: 'Head her off!'

"They did. 'Twa'n't but a minute 'fore she broke for the shore an' run aground. Pap was jist a-dancin'. Old Dewey, he knocked off for breakfast an' all that time them Spanish ships was a-burnin' an' a blowin' up worse'n any old Fourth o' July you ever see. When they s'rendered, pap he was jist so tickled he clean fergot all his own trouble."

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"Why, what was his trouble?" asked "Turkey-egg" McLaughlin.

"Why, dad blame it!" snapped the impatient Garfy. "Didn't I jist tell you we went around the world a-purpose to gain a day? An' here we went an' lost one. We come acrost to 'Frisco an' home by the cars, an' now pap he'll have to keep Friday for Sabbath, 'r else do jist luck the rest o' folks. I d'know which he's a-goin' to do. He ain't said."

"Look luck you had your trip for nothin'," commented "Turkey-egg."

"Well," said Garfy, "that was some of a disappointment. We lost a day, but we seen Dewey win one. The way I look at it, that kind o' evens things up."

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AN INDIAN SUMMER LOVE STORY

"WELL, now, if I was you, S'repty, I wouldn't bother my head about it one second," declared Mrs. Parker. "It's all right. He's a very nice man, this Mr. Frizzell——"

"Frazee," corrected Sarepta.

"Frazee, then. I'm the poorest hand for names. I jist *can't* keep 'em in my head. Very nice and quiet. I put him at that little table over there in the corner by the window and you don't hardly hear a word out of him. At first I thought him and me wasn't goin' to get along at all. He couldn't drink this here ten-cent coffee that comes already browned. Went all around town lookin' for *good* coffee. Otho Littell was tellin' me how he showed Mr. Fusee——"

"Frazee."

"Frazee. I know. Ain't it ridiculous I can't remember it? The very best they was in town Otho showed him and he jist run his hands through it and smelled of it and says: 'Huh!' jist like that, and turned on his heel and walked out. 'Well,' I says to myself, 'if *that's* the way—' And then he sent off and got a bag o' some kind of coffee—he told me the name of it, too

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—ker-boom or ker-slam—I don't know. Anyhow he wanted me to brown it for him. 'Well, now,' I says to myself, 'my days o' brownin' coffee in a pan in the oven is past and gone too long ago to talk about.' But he was so nice and said he'd pay me for my trouble that I jist couldn't say no to him. It's awful nice flavored, the way he has me make it for him, but la me! if I was to drink it as strong as Mr. Frazer drinks it——"

"Frazee."

"As Mr. Frazee drinks it—I jist can *not* keep names in my head—why, I couldn't sleep a wink. Why, it's as black as tar. Yes, sir. I don't believe it's good for the health to drink it as strong as all that."

"But don't you think——"

"But that's the only thing, and as far as your givin' yourself one minute's uneasiness for fear folks'll talk about you because you got this Mr. What-you-may-call-'im for a roomer and you all by yourself, why I wouldn't *think* of it. Why, do you s'pose if I thought they was anything wrong about it, I'd ha' sent him over to your house to get a room when I was all full up? Why, no. And wasn't it providential now that he come along jist when he did, and you worried out o' your life and soul with that old Jerusalem cricket, Sister—Sister-rah— Oh, what's her name now?"

"Sister Pennypiece."

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"I do' know whatever possessed you to go and invite her to stay with you a few days after camp meetin' when you might 'a' knowed she was jist one o' them deadbeats and lookin' for somebody that she could sponge off of and stay the whole fall and winter. And thinks I: 'There's a good chance o' helpin' her out and me, too,' so I says to this Mr. ——, I says to him: 'You can get a room, like enough, at S'repty Downey's,' I says, and he looked at me *so funny*. And he went right over and you rented the room to him. I thought that was too killin'. I bet she jist raved and caved when she come back and found out."

"Well, no. *She* didn't, but Aunt Betty Mooney that was with her——"

"There's a pair of 'em for you."

"Aunt Betty about raised the roof. She talked awful to me. Said it was easy to see what I was up to."

"She didn't!"

"Oh, yes, she did. She told me I was one of them that thinks it ain't ever too late to get a beau——"

"Oh, good land! You!"

"I felt awful, and if he hadn't paid me in advance I don't know but I'd have——"

"Now, don't you go and be foolish. Why, my grief! Here you've lived here all your life till you're gray headed and not a word against you in any

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shape, manner, or form, and people thinks the world and all of you. Don't you s'pose folks has got *some* sense?"

"Yes, but you know what Aunt Betty and Sister Pennypiece are to talk."

"And don't everybody know that? And this Mr. Fusell——"

"Mr. Frazee."

"Yes. He's an old man, too, ain't he?"

"Well, I don't know as you'd call him old."

"He's about your age, ain't he?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but you don't think I'm old, do you?"

"Well, you're no spring chicken, S'repty; but I will say that for a woman o' your age, you're mighty trim and well preserved. It's a pity you ever got that notion into your head about bein' engaged to Sam Coulter. You might 'a' got married a dozen times over and not be left alone the way you was when your pa died. I expect that was more'n half the reason you had that old Jerusalem cricket come up and stay with you, bein' so lonesome. I blame your pa for breakin' it off with Sam in the first place."

"No, now that was my fault. I oughtn't to have quarreled with him about Sallie Mumma. Then he wouldn't have enlisted."

"Well, we won't talk about that now. Anybody

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that knows how you could have had your pick o' the men when you was young ain't goin' to believe you're after 'em now. He don't bother you none, does he? Comin' in and settin', I mean."

"Who? Mr. Frazee?"

"Um."

"Oh, no. Not at all."

"Well, then, why should you fret?"

"I don't know as I do fret. But here lately every Wednesday evening when I come out of prayer meeting, he's waiting to see me home. He said it didn't look right to him to see a lady alone on the street at night and——"

"Um," assented Mrs. Parker. "I say so, too."

"And if I didn't have any other company and didn't object he had just as lives come by for me as not. I told him I was used to it. Pa never would go with me, you know. But he said it wasn't any bother and he would unless I objected, and I couldn't very well say I objected, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, I didn't want people to think he was going with me."

"And wouldn't it be terrible if they did! Wouldn't it be just terrible! Now look here, S'repty, if you want to know, I think it's all foolishness for you to think you dassen't look at a man just because Sam Coulter never come back from the war. I'd put on

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mournin' for him and be done with it and not punish myself the way you do."

Sarepta shook her head.

"If people should say that I was going with Mr. Frazee I'd have to tell him to go. I couldn't stand it. I'd hate awful to tell him to go, but that's just what I'd have to do if—people said that."

"Now don't you worry. They won't nobody talk about you unless it is old Aunt Betty and the Jerusalem cricket, and if they do, why people won't pay one bit of attention. They'll jist consider the source."

And this was exactly what people did.

The romantic story of Sarepta Downey was one of the traditions of Minuca Center. The little old maid with the glow in her cheeks, like the Indian summer of a girl's blush, would have been dear to all because of her devotion to the memory of her old sweetheart even if she hadn't been the good soul she was.

Old Aaron Downey was a quarrelsome old man. In war time he was a Vallandigham Democrat, as much to be contrary as anything, and when Sarepta became engaged to Sam Coulter, the boy old Adam Coulter took to raise, who lived out on the Pharisburg road next to Mumma's and was a black Abolitionist, he fairly pawed up the ground. Old man Coulter didn't like it either. He wanted Sam to have Sallie Mumma, and when Sam, to please him, took

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Sallie to a couple of places, old Aaron taunted Sarepta so that in a passion of jealousy she quarreled with Sam. She had no idea he would take it to heart, but he did, and the next thing was, he had enlisted and gone to Camp Chase.

Pa Downey strictly forbade her to write the scratch of a pen to any "Lincoln hireling," and if Sam ever wrote to her she never got the letter. Nobody would have put it past Aaron Downey to have kept the letters from her, but if Sarepta thought so she never accused her father of it. She blamed herself for it all. She knew Sam liked her and was engaged to her, as witness the little set ring he had given her, which she had worn to paper thinness. She knew he didn't care for Sallie Mumma. When he came back she was going to take all the blame on herself. But he didn't come back. She had not even the melancholy satisfaction of knowing that he was dead. Among her scanty treasures, an old daguerreotype of Sam in a square case lined with red velvet, a dried flower he had picked for her, and a basket he had whittled out of a peach stone, there was a frayed and yellow clipping from the *Weekly Examiner* giving the list of casualties among the Logan County boys in one of the skirmishes before Richmond. One item was: "Private Samuel Coulter, missing." That was all. The rest was silence.

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But though Sam never came back, she still considered herself engaged to him. Fellows would start in to keep company with her, well-off fellows, too, but she gave them to understand that she considered herself engaged to Sam Coulter, and after a while they would stop going with her.

"You act like a fool, S'repty," her father would snarl at her, "a regular, cussed fool. Who was he, anyhow, to make so much fuss about? Old Ad. Coulter's bound boy. Lord knows what kind o' low trash he come from."

But with the obstinacy of the timid she held her course. It was no more than right that she should do as she did after the way she had treated Sam. Almost the last thing her father had said to her was that she had been a "cussed fool" to stay single when she had so many chances to marry and do well. He was going to die and she'd be all alone in the world, and whose fault was it? Why, hers, because she had been such a "cussed fool."

But she tended him lovingly and mourned him sincerely and even missed him when he was gone. Even his rasping voice was good to hear. It was the voice of a man, and man is the fountain of authority. Though he was old and feeble, she did not know what it was to be afraid when she padlocked the cellar door at night and shut the shutters and locked up the house.

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This Sister Pennypiece that had fastened herself on Sarepta at the Urbana camp meeting and had proved such a bore that she was glad to get her out, was almost worse than nobody at all. For she used to sit and tell the most awful tales of people living alone and being found in the morning with their throats cut, and then she would grab Sarepta and whisper: "Sh! Did you hear that?" After a long and breathless pause she would whisper: "It sounded like somebody walkin' around upstairs."

Since this Mr. Frazee had come to take Sister Pennypiece's room she had not felt afraid at all. If burglars got in there was a man in the house, somebody that could attend to their case. But if people were going to talk about it, she would have to tell him to go.

Now there is no denying that Aunt Betty Mooney did go around town declaring that it was scandalous, simply scandalous, for Sarepta Downey, a member of Center Street M. E., to be living alone in the house with a man and that man beauing her around. It ought to be brought up before the officiary and she ought to be rebuked. And that man Frazee, public opinion ought to attend to him. Who was he, anyhow? Where'd he come from? What was he after? Why didn't he go to work or do something, like he'd ought to? Wasn't there anybody had spunk enough to up and ask him?

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"I jox I d'know, Aunt Betty," said Otho Littell. "Seems not. Why don't you?"

"Yes, and have him tell me to go 'long about my business. I see myself talkin' to that man. The looks of him is enough for me."

"Aw, now, Aunt Betty, he's a very nice-lookin' man, with that big beard o' his, tall and not too fleshy, and straight as a candle. 'Tain't often you see a man like that when he's gittin' gray."

"Struttin' along the street, as if he owned it, and puffin' his filthy tobacco smoke in people's faces. Well, mebby not right *in* their faces, but poisonin' the very air they breathe. Nobody can be a pure man and use tobacco. Now that's so, Brother Littell. You know what the Scripture says about layin' aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. Tobacco wasn't invented in them days, I know, but if that ain't it to a t-y, ty, then I don't want a cent and you needn't think I don't see you tryin' to hide that there quid o' tobacco in your cheek, Brother Littell, because I do, and the Lord sees it too, and, come Judgment Day, you'll hear from Him, now, sure's you're a foot high."

"All right, Aunt Betty. Now what else was it you wanted to-day? Tea, sugar, coffee, canned peaches—we got some nice canned corn."

"Well, you might send me up a can o' corn and about three pounds o' sugar and a quarter of a

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pound o' tea, and if the officiary don't do nothin' about S'repty and that man Frazee— How would you like some dried beef, Sister Pennypiece? About half a pound, Otho. Thin, now. Jist as thin as you can— Why, then, the citizens had ought to take 'em in hand."

Sister Pennypiece apparently tried to check the fury of Aunt Betty's accusations, but it was as Clarence Bowersox, Mr. Littell's clerk, said after the two had gone out: "And all the time, *all the time*, mind you, a-gittin' in her mean little insinuendos."

"Oh, she's got it in for S'repty, no two ways about that," said Mr. Littell. "I jox! It ain't no snap to live at Aunt Betty's, even if you do gitch board for nothin'. She had it easy at S'repty's. They tell me she wouldn't even make her own bed. I bet old Aunt Betty makes her stand around. I jox!"

Part of Aunt Betty's animosity to Frazee was due to the fact that nobody had found out much about him, and she resented it. People that were so still about themselves must be up to some devilment or other. But while Minuca Center was as curious as she, there was something about Frazee that forbade catechising. From his ordering Coban coffee; from his getting letters with a long-tailed bird on the postage stamps, and from his talking Spanish with old man Sanchez, the cigar-maker, they inferred that

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he must have lived in Mexico or South America or some such place.

Sarepta was finding out more about him than anybody, but so fearful was she that folks would think she was going with him that she never mentioned his name, but kept all these things in her heart.

Coming home from prayer meeting began to be an event she looked forward to all week. She had always liked geography, and it was most interesting to talk with Mr. Frazee, who had lived where they had palm trees and bananas and vanilla and all that. He had had a coffee plantation in San Rafael, province of Coban, Guatemala, and he told her all about raising coffee; how they had to be so careful of the young plants and shade them with bananas; how the coffee berry was something like a cherry, only instead of having a pit it had these two seeds. He told her about the people down there and how the young fellows courted the girls and never got a chance to speak to them. He told her about bullfights and all such, but most interesting of all, he told her how he had come to go there right after the War of the Rebellion, when he was just a boy, as you might say, and with all a boy's love of the adventurous life whetted, not satiated, with the few months' soldiering he had had; how sick he was of it in a little while, and how he wanted to go back home, only he couldn't, because he didn't have the

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money, and then when he did get the money, how he had become a little better used to it and, finding a good opportunity for investment, he had started in to raise coffee. He had done pretty well, he didn't say how well, but pretty well. And then a man came along and offered him his price, or near about, and he felt a great longing to get back to God's country. Sometimes he thought he ought never to have left it. He ought to have gone back North after the war was over.

"And why didn't you?"

"Oh, well, all my folks were dead, and there was nobody that cared for me, so I thought."

They walked on and presently Frazee broke out with:

"I'm just about wild to see snow, snow on the ground, snow that you can go sleighing on. I used to dream about snow. First good snowstorm that comes along, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to have a sleigh ride and I'm going to take you with me, that is, if you'll go. Will you?"

"Why, I should be pleased to accept your kind invitation," she answered with old-fashioned politeness.

And then she remembered that she had not been sleigh riding since the time she and Sam Coulter had the spat about Sallie Mumma. The more she thought about it the more she felt that she ought

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not to go. It worried her so that the next day she waylaid Frazee in the hall to tell him so.

"Mr. Frazee," she said, and twisted the little old-fashioned ring on her finger, as she did when nervous, "I don't know as it would be right for me to go sleigh riding as I told you I would. I thank you for your kind invitation, but——"

"Not right?"

"Well, of course it wouldn't be *wrong* exactly, but —now, I don't want you to think that I've got anything against you, for I haven't. I don't know as there's anybody I like better—of course, you know, I don't mean *in that way*." She blushed to think how clumsily she was doing it.

He seemed to leap at an opportunity.

"And don't you think you could like me *in that way*?" he demanded, bending over her and looking into her eyes. She blushed still deeper and dropped her lids. "Perhaps I go about it all too bluntly, but this is Indian summer with you and me. We have no time to lose in our love making. Don't you think, from what you have seen of me, that you could 'like me *in that way*' enough"—he swallowed —"enough to marry me?"

She winced and caught her breath with a sob.

"Oh!" she quavered, "I couldn't! I couldn't! It wouldn't be right. I do esteem you. I do l-like you as well as anybody I ever saw, I don't know

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but better. But it wouldn't be right." Her voice strengthened as she got on familiar ground. "I am engaged to Mr. Sam Coulter."

"Coulter?"

"He was a young man I kept company with, and he went and enlisted in the war, and I am waiting for him to come back."

"Why, my dear, that's forty years ago."

"No. Only thirty-eight. It was in the fall of '64 he enlisted. But that's no difference. He didn't break the engagement and I mustn't. As long as I don't know he's dead or married to some other girl it wouldn't be right for me to have anybody else, no matter how much I liked him. I expect you think it's kind of foolish in me," she added piteously.

"No, no. Not at all. This man that you speak of——"

"Mr. Coulter?"

"Yes. Hasn't he written to you in all these years?"

"That don't make any difference. I couldn't have anybody else unless he broke the engagement or—died."

"And this is the ring he gave you?" he asked, taking her hand gently.

"Yes," she answered. "It's all worn thin now, but it was a right pretty ring when he gave it to me. I've never taken it off only when I washed my hands,

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and one time I lost it for pretty near a week and——"

She broke off her prattle in surprise. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. It was an unfamiliar caress.

"'I have not known such faith,'" he quoted. "'No, not in Israel.'" Then, after a moment, he said: "But what if he's dead?"

She shook her head.

"If I should prove it to you that he was dead, would that——"

"How could you prove it now?" she asked.

"Yes, that's so. It's a long time ago."

He forbore to press home the point he might have made that she had tacitly confessed that in her heart she knew her lover was long since dead, and that this pretended waiting for him was the fiction with which she concealed even from herself that she was doing penance for a girlish fault, her hasty words spoken a generation ago. She thanked him for it inwardly.

"Yes," she echoed, and drew a long, quivering sigh. "It's a long time ago." And just that tender sadness that we feel whenever we think of days gone by turned the pent-up tide of emotion into the channel of tears. She fled from him into her own rooms. She could not bear that he should see her cry.

She heard him go out a little later. When she had

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recovered herself somewhat she determined that she must tell him when he came in again that it wouldn't do for him to stay in the house. She knew that he was honorable and all that, but now that he had become a suitor—why, it wouldn't do, and that was all there was about it. It would be terrible to have to tell him. She might better have had Sister Penny-piece stay on. And yet, the verses came into her mind:

> 'Twere better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.

But something in her resented that. You couldn't say that she had "never loved at all" before he came. She had loved Sam Coulter, hadn't she? Yes, and loved him still. And she ought not to say that she loved Mr. Frazee as long as she was engaged to Sam Coulter. But that was a girl's love, a jealous, flaming love, while this was calmer, more placid, more beautiful, as Indian summer is more beautiful than it is in August.

No, no. She must not think of loving him. He ought to look for somebody else, some younger woman. He might just as well as not, he being right in the prime of life, as you might say. She tried to think who would do for him, but it horrified her to find how to think of him as married to another woman was like a knife struck into her heart. If it was going to be like that, Mr. Frazee would cer-

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tainly have to go. She was engaged to Sam Coulter. She must remember that. And yet, for the first time, she almost regretted that vestal troth of hers.

She did not hear him come in that night. She did not hear him go out in the morning. She waited till a reasonable hour and then, since the matter was so instant, she nerved herself to go up and knock upon his door. There was no response. A cold fear came over her. If he should have died in the night! To be a second time bereaved of—yes, of a lover. She tried the door. It opened. The bed had not been slept in.

He did not return that day. The house was lonely that night, and she dared not go to a neighbor's or have a neighbor in. It was important that she should speak to him the very first opportunity. It was very lonely. Sarepta quaked at every rattle of the window. Every step she hearkened to and every step passed on. The next day and the next night and still no sign of him. Stepping over to Mrs. Parker's for news, she encountered that lady stepping over to her house for news. Why had not Mr. Frazee come to his meals? Sarepta plainly showed anxiety and more, which Mrs. Parker notified to all and several she knew.

As Frazee's absence lengthened into a week and then into a fortnight, the whole town, instructed by Mrs. Parker, observed and commented upon Sa-

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repta's appearance, not wholly without amusement, since everybody else's love affair is of necessity comic, and yet not wholly without pity either. Except, of course, with Aunt Betty Mooney and Sister Pennypiece. This latter lady said, in a voice like cold cream, that she hoped this would be a lesson to dear Sister Downey and teach her to set her affections on things above—not on things on the earth.

"I jox!" said Otho Littell. "Whadda you think o' that? Ain't that gall for you!"

But a day came whereon Frazee did return, and Sarepta's joy at seeing him was dashed with bitterness as she thought of what she had to say to him. She stammered out a beginning, but he hushed her with:

"Wait. Wait till to-night. I have invited Mr. and Mrs. Longenecker over and Mr. and Mrs. Lester Pettitt. They're your most intimate friends. I want them to be here. I have a surprise for you."

Sarepta received her pastor and his wife with a nervousness that the commonplaces about the weather did not assuage.

"Mr. Frazee'll be down in a minute," she fluttered. "He said for me to entertain you till he came."

"He's been away, I believe," said Mrs. Longenecker, by way of making conversation.

"Yes, he just got back this afternoon."

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They rocked in uneasy silence for some minutes. Then Sarepta began:

"Brother Longenecker, I just wish't you'd tell me what I ought to do. Yes, and you, too, Sister Longenecker. You were so good to me when pa died. I've been going to ask you a dozen times, but I couldn't quite spunk up to it."

She was interrupted by the doorbell announcing the Pettitts. During the amenities convention has prescribed, Sarepta and the Longeneckers visibly fidgeted.

"Would you wish to discuss that little matter in private, Sister Downey?" at length inquired the minister.

"No," sighed Sarepta. "Not particularly. I wouldn't want the whole town to know it, but Mr. and Mrs. Pettitt here, they're just like kinfolks to me, and I don't know but more so. It's this way: Mr. Frazee wants me to marry him."

She looked up, expecting to find shocked surprise upon their countenances, but they bore the news with resignation.

"Well?" inquired Brother Longenecker, hardened by his calling to matrimony as butchers are to bloodshed.

"Well, I wanted to know if you thought it would be right for me to have him."

"My dear sister," said the minister, "that's for

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you to say, not me. He seems to be a very nice man, what I've seen of him, but it's you that must be suited. Do you love him?"

"Well, but that ain't it. I——"

"Well, but I think that *is* exactly it."

Mrs. Longenecker compressed her lips and solemnly nodded, assenting to her husband's views.

"No, I gave Mr. Coulter my promise I'd marry him, and he hasn't let me off or broke the engagement. They tell me he is dead, but supposing he ain't and he should ever come back, ain't I bound to wait for him?"

"Supposing it was proved to you that he is dead, do you like Mr. Frazee well enough to marry him?"

"I don't know but I do. Yes, yes, I do know that I do. But my promise to Sam?"

"Then it's the vow that keeps you back. It is a matter of conscience with you, then?"

"Yes, I s'pose it is."

"A vow whose result is for good and not for evil is a vow to be kept, but a vow to punish yourself, and not yourself alone but another, cannot bind because it is—it is—" The minister hesitated.

"Void as against public policy," prompted Lester Pettitt.

"Exactly. Now, if you love Mr. Frazee——"

"I do, I do," burst out Sarepta, "but I can't bear to give up Sam. I've been engaged to him so long.

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Oh, why did I ever talk so to him? Why did I drive him away?" she cried hysterically. "O Sam! Sam! Come back to me! Tell me whether you're alive or dead!"

"There, there, Sarepta," soothed Mrs. Pettitt. "I wouldn't take on so. I don't know as I ever saw you so excited. You must be calm."

"I'll try," she whimpered, and then suddenly broke out with: "Why can't they come back and tell us? Why can't they? Why can't they?"

The door opened.

Sarepta screamed and stared with bulging eyes. There stood a soldier in the cape overcoat and baggy forage cap of the period of the Civil War. His pale, smooth-shaven visage smiled faintly at her. She staggered to her feet, deathly white. The figure held out its arms.

"Sam!" she cried with a choking gasp, and would have fallen but Mrs. Pettitt caught her.

"Lie right flat down on the floor," she commanded, "that's the best way. It's the most awful sickening feeling when you're going to faint. Lie right flat down, dear, and you'll soon be over it. My goodness, Mr. Frazee, you scared me, too, for all I knew just what was coming. I never would have known you with your beard off."

"Sam!" whispered Sarepta.

"Yes, Sam," said Frazee, kneeling beside her and

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taking the hand that wore the little old set ring. "I knew you the minute I saw you, but when you didn't recognize me I thought I'd court you all over again and see if you could love me as myself and not as the memory of your old sweetheart. I have come back. Sam Coulter has come back to claim you."

"But, Mr. Frazee—" began Sarepta.

"Frazee is my true and legal name. Adam Coulter only brought me up. I have come back to claim you. Will you have me, after all?"

She reached her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Well—er—er," Mr. Longenecker began, wiping his glasses and then his eyes. "Brother Frazee, I would suggest that if you—er—had a license now we might—er—go ahead, as it were."

Frazee fumbled in the pockets of the overcoat.

"Here are the proofs that I was born Frazee. Here's my honorable discharge from the army. Here is a certificate from the *jefe politico* of San Rafael, province of Coban, Guatemala, that I am still a bachelor—that's why I was so long away—and, ah, yes, here it is—here is a license from the county clerk of Logan County——"

"Sister Pettitt, will you stand over there? And Brother Pettitt, you stand right here."

"What! Get married right now?" cried Sarepta,

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scrambling to her feet. " Why, we'll have to wait till I can get my wedding things ready! "

" Not a minute longer, deary," said Frazee, taking her hand. " It is Indian summer with us. We have waited too long already."

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THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

THAT the very existence of the Second Presbyterian Church of Minuca Center, as a corporate body, was soon to come to an end was a foreboding that the elders, deacons, and trustees were no longer able to keep either from or to themselves. There were not too many Presbyterians in the Center, anyhow, and some of the young people openly said it was just foolishness to keep up two churches. They had forgotten, if they ever knew, what it was that made the Second Church split off from the First. They liked to hear Mr. Hall, the pastor of the First Church, preach, and here lately nearly all of those who had no battleground to look back upon, and those, too, in whose memories that battleground had been grassed over, had taken to going to the First Church Sunday evenings, where they had an organ and a choir. John Snodgrass, the precentor of the Second, with his tuning fork and his "down, left, right, up," was very much opposed to such heathenish carryings on in the house of God; it was too much like the Catholics, and he had heard that the doctrine was none too

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scriptural; "and yit," he admitted, scratching his chin and screwing up his face, "and yit they is sech a thing as bein' a *leetle* mite *too* scriptural." The men of the congregation thought so, too, but the women folks, trained for centuries to think no evil of the reverend clergy, said: "Well, I believe Mr. Bailey is a *good* man, and there is a great deal in his sermons that it'd be well if we'd all take to heart." Whereat the men, wise in their day and generation, simply shifted their chewing tobacco to the other cheek, and looked away off yonder somewhere.

And then came the famous sermon on the man found picking up sticks on the Sabbath day.

"If," said the preacher, "the Lord that made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is and rested the seventh day, wherefore He blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, if He, whose property it is always to have mercy, yet condemned to death the sinner, just out of idolatrous Egypt, to whom the command was hardly yet familiar and lacking the authority of long-continued hearing, what shall *our* portion be, brethren and sisters in the Lord, who have heard from our youth up the solemn words: 'The seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God'? The man found picking up sticks might say he had forgotten; he would not dare to set up another authority against the word of the Almighty thundered from Sinai, but what have we done? We have

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made His commandment of none effect and have substituted another day, on whose authority, fellow-sinners and dying souls? On the authority of our heathen ancestors, in their blindness worshiping the greater light of heaven instead of Him who set it there; on the authority of antichrist himself, that is to say, the Pope of Rome with all his pagan idolatry and soul-destroying mummeries!"

The elders and pillars of the church fidgeted in their pews, and Horatio Southard got up and "stomped" out, followed by Mrs. Southard, red and embarrassed, mincing and bridling as she pushed ahead of her little Johnny, who kept whimpering all the way down the aisle, "What for, ma? What for? Meetin' ain't out yit. What for, ma?" She never forgave Rashe for putting her in such a predicament, and worst of all, that he had prevented her from hearing at first hand the announcement of Mr. Bailey that hereafter, God willing, there would be no more preaching on the heathenish Sun-day, but that on the coming Sabbath—that is to say, Saturday—there would be divine service at the usual hours, 10.30 in the morning and 7.30 in the evening.

After church the congregation gathered at the doors and felt in the clear air and familiar scenes that they were once again in a sane and reasonable world where things were as they always had been. There was Judge Rodehaver's house across the way, there

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was the horse block. Yes, it was just the same as ever. But inside, under the spell of that wild, impetuous eloquence, the former things seemed to have passed away and all things to have become new. Though they all knew what the Shorter Catechism said about the Christian Sabbath, yet even now they were so bewitched that they never even thought of it.

"It did certainly seem reasonable," declared the Widow Parker with her Teacher's Bible, ragged from long and hard usage, "if you run up the references, like what he give you. Most of 'em I got, and they was jist like what he said, but laws! I don't believe I could get my bakin' done in time for meetin' Saddy. W'y, Saddy's my busiest day!"

"Ain't it everybody's busiest day?" demanded Cal Hubert, bobbing his head at Mrs. Parker, scowling and wabbling his long, loose forefinger at her, as if he were going to eat her up. "Ain't I got to stay down at the store till 'way late Saddy night, ten, 'leven, twelve o'clock? Ain't I? Ain't I? Well, I tell you the Sabbath was made for man. Yes, sir, the Sabbath was made for man, so it was. Yes, sir. Not man for the Sabbath. No, sir. Made for man." He canted his head to one side and brought it back as if he had said the word that ended the dispute.

"Well, but, Calvin," began Mrs. Parker, "I don't see as that text—" But Marinus Moran cut in with

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his deep, slow voice to demand: "To go buggy ridin' on?" Mr. Moran felt called upon at all times and in all places to point out to others wherein they erred and came short.

"Oh, well, now, Mr. Moran, don't you go to gittin' pers'nal. That ain't the question. That ain't it at all. What I done ain't the question. No, sir. It was away last summer, anyways. It ain't the question. You show me chapter an' verse where it says not to go buggy ridin' on Sunday. You jist show it to me. Point it out to me. You show it." Cal was excitedly bobbing his head at Marinus and shaking his forefinger at him and overpowering the boom of his heavy artillery with the rattle of his rapid-fire gun.

"Sh!" said several others all at once, and the groups parted silently and left a clear way down the brick walk. The preacher passed, making slight impersonal bows right and left. His black eyes blazed with excitement, his lips moved, and his fingers worked. Lean and lank he lurched along, his coat tails flying as he swung his arms. His wife, a pale, sandy-haired woman as lean as he, but with a more "peaked" look because of her long nose, followed leading little Eunice and Ira, her eyes on her husband as if he had mesmerized her.

Center Street M. E. let out about the same time, and of course the Second Presbyterians could not keep their own affairs to themselves, but had to tell

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it, and so the Center Street folks had plenty to talk about that afternoon. Perhaps they were rather glad of it. All the other churches in town had had their troubles, but not Center Street, no, not Center Street. "A thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee." The day of Center Street was not yet come, but when it did— Let us not talk about it. There are some things—many things—it were better not to think about, let alone to put into words.

At the preacher's house, Mrs. Bailey took off her things without a word and hung them up. She went out into the kitchen, and into her pale, bulging eyes the tears came as she got ready the dinner of steak, cut thin, pounded, scored, and fried very well done, mashed potatoes, and dried-apple pie. Ira and Eunice put their things away, too, and pushed themselves up on chairs in the parlor, where they sat with their hands folded and watched their father pace up and down with his hands behind him and muttering to himself. They cowered as he came near them once. The motion attracted his notice. He stopped and looked at them and then resumed his walk.

"Innocent children!" he declaimed, in his preaching voice. "Not yet blighted with sin. Not yet. Ira, do you feel your calling and election sure? You do, don't you, Eunice?"

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"Yeththir," she answered promptly.

"And don't you, Ira? Don't you, my son?"

The boy dug his toe into the faded carpet and replied doggedly: "I do if Eunice does," and stole a look at her.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," the preacher went on rhapsodically, "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven. . . . Of such is the kingdom. . . . Unspotted from the world and yet how soon to be exposed to its temptations and to lose their primal innocence." He stopped and put his hand on Ira's head. The boy moved his head as if a little scared, and the hand slid down on the child's neck at the corner of his jaw and then was snatched away. The preacher had begun to say: "It was accounted unto Abraham for righteousness—" When he resumed his natural voice and said to them quite gently: "You can run out and play." As he saw them hesitate, he urged them: "Go on; go on. You can play all you want to and have a nice time." They darted out eagerly.

The mother opened a side door and whispered to them: "I wouldn't make any noise if I was you. It's Sunday, and people might think it was strange."

"We'll be real thtill, ma," lisped Eunice.

Ira waited till the door shut, and then continued what he had been saying: "And you know they's these here false-face things they put on and he could

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easy get clothes like pa's and false hair and whiskers like his."

"Where do you thpose our real pa ith, then?" asked Eunice.

"I don't know. Mebby he's dead. Mebby this other man toled him off summers and killed him and got his clothes, and could talk like him and then got the false face and put it on. I tell you, Eunice, next time he hugs you you feel and see if you can't find the string where the false face is tied on."

"O Ira, you. I'm afraid."

"Huck-uh. He never hugs me. Say, I wonder if he ain't lookin' for the string to *my* false face. He's always feelin' at my neck."

Mrs. Bailey overheard part of their talk and groaned aloud. "O my Lord! They've noticed it! What shall I tell them?" As she leaned over to poke the frying steak with a fork she whispered: "Why has this affliction come upon us? Was it because I made an idol of him?"

At dinner Mr. Bailey made a long and wandering prayer when he asked a blessing. He paused for, it seemed, a minute and said "Amen!" quite suddenly. Then he resumed his natural voice and began helping the plates. He took a sup of the thin coffee and a bite of the soggy bread and sat staring at his plate.

"Mr. Bailey," said his wife, "you ort to eat more dinner. You don't seem to have no appetite here

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lately. You don't eat enough to keep a bird alive. Take some of the meat."

He took up the carving knife, looked at it, felt of the edge, and started up, flinging down the knife and crying: "No, no! I can't make the sacrifice. I love them too much; I love them too much!" He ran upstairs, waving his hands over his head, and Mrs. Bailey heard his study door slam. She and the children ate on in terrified silence, and when they had finished she sent them out to play in the back yard. "Very softly now," she cautioned them. "It's Sunday, you know, and folks might think strange."

After they had gone, she listened at the stairway and heard him groan: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." This was something new. She wondered what it was. It couldn't be this about the Seventh Day, because he had talked that all over with her and had overborne her feeble resistance. It had been a great cross, but her back was fitted to that burden now. It had called for all the economy she was mistress of to provide for the family and keep Ira and Eunice looking nice for school on the small salary, and here lately the congregation hadn't liked Mr. Bailey's preaching. Of course now they would take it to the Presbytery and Mr. Bailey would be put out, and what they should do then she did not know. But that was not what was worrying Mr. Bailey. He had told her the

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Lord would provide for all their temporal wants, but what was this that had come over him? She did not know, but she feared for the worst. She would have to wait, and she would have to keep it to herself.

Saturday morning all hearkened for the bell of the Second Presbyterian. It was a little late, but it sounded. Mr. Bailey rang it himself, and the town applauded the spirit of Dicky Tomlinson, the sexton, in rebelling against the preacher. It was well advertised that he had said he'd be jiggered if he rung that bell or opened the church. He was paid to do that Sundays and Wednesday evenings. That was the understanding when he took the job. Sunday and Wednesday evenings he'd open up and ring the bell, and all, same as ever, but he'd be jiggered if he would on Saturdays. What did the Bible say? Didn't it say: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmarks"? And when he had made all his arrangements, and anybody, preacher or who, come along and upset 'em, wasn't that just the same as removing landmarks? Well, he guessed. He saw himself ringing that bell on a Saturday; he just saw himself. Charley Pope said that was the spirit of '76.

There were only a few of the regular congregation out, some of the real old people that had no other way to pass the time, and a few children. But there was a full attendance of certain of whom all the town thought when the Epistle of Jude was read:

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"Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." They were there, and they seemed to Mrs. Bailey to be vultures gathering around the dying.

There was Marinus Moran, who had gone a pilgrimage of all the churches in the Center, looking, as he said, for one where there was "heartfelt" religion, but in reality seeking a place where he could lord it over everybody. He had been known to pray fifteen minutes on a stretch, and a giggle went up from the back seats at prayer meeting whenever his trumpet-toned address began: "High! Holay! Almighty! Everlasting Ngon!" He was a terrible old man, and all that decent people wanted buried out of sight and forgotten, as it must be if this world is to be lived in at all, he delighted to bring up, especially in his long prayers.

Aunt Betty Mooney was there. She used to get to shouting during the sermon, and from shouting she went on to exhorting while the preacher had to stand and look at her. They had a terrible time with her at St. Paul's once when Brother Breen was preaching. She started in, for he was a powerful man, and stirred folks up considerably. He stood it as

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long as he could, and then broke in with: "'Let your women keep silence in the churches.'"

"I don't hold by everything that Paul said," she answered him. "He owned up that sometimes he spoke as a fool, and this was one o' them times."

"Put her out!" said Brother Breen.

"I won't be put out!" she screamed, and hung onto the pew while the men tugged at her and nearly tore the clothes off her back. They got her out into the aisle and there she flung herself flat on the floor, kicking her heels and squalling: "'For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'" Four of the stewards had to pick her up bodily and carry her out, locking the door after her, which she pounded till she saw Constable Halloran coming. Poor old Aunt Betty! She was the best soul when there was sickness.

There was Zimri Hollabaugh, not so litigious as these two, but none the less a disturbing element, so that the sextons of all the churches had orders to keep him out. For while he often behaved with exemplary decorum, no one could tell when he would get "the pay-wer" and display what he was so proud of, the apostolic gift of tongues not understanded of the people. Right in the middle of the minister's most impassioned period, he would jump up and, clinging to the pew in front of him, would close his eyes and sway back and forth, chanting: "O

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yay! O yay! Losh-cum-aloshity wa-wa. Rascumtooleroo, bullallop, bullallop!" never ceasing till he was led out.

There was "Tepe" Armstrong, who proved things out of the works of his illustrious namesake, Flavius Josephus, and Alanson McKinnon, and a few more of those who delighted in theological disputations and whom the present rebellious attitude of the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey attracted as a rubbed comb attracts light bodies. These gathered around him after service to congratulate him on his stand for true Gospel religion. Mrs. Bailey's heart sank within her as she saw him talking to them eagerly, taking them at their own valuation.

Next day Dicky Tomlinson rang the bell as usual, but Mr. Bailey did not appear. He had told the session he would not, and they got old Mr. MacFarlane, the stated clerk of the Presbytery, to officiate. There was a meeting of the congregation after the sermon at which an overture was made to Presbytery to constitute the court of Christ to try the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey for heresy, to sever the pastoral relation heretofore existing between him and the Second Church, and to take such steps as might be necessary to reunite with the First Church.

Then there came a day when the Baileys had to move out of the parsonage and into a little house up on Mad River Street, where on Saturdays the

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little congregation of "Searchers," as these recalcitrants called themselves, met in the front room, till they should need a larger edifice. The collections had a weekly average of fifty-three cents. Once they took in fifty-eight cents. On that the family of the Rev. Jeremiah Bailey was supposed to exist.

But if that had been all that Mrs. Bailey had been called upon to suffer, she would have borne her burden with a light heart. Mr. Bailey was sleeping very little nights now. She could wake up at any time and hear him groaning: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" and then he would repeat long passages from Revelations. He was preaching a series of sermons on the seven angels with the trumpets. Let her drop off to sleep, wearied with her cares, when she might and wake when she might, she would always hear that agonized plea, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!"

The explanation of his distress of soul came one night when she awoke with a sudden chill on her neck. It was the carving knife laid against her flesh.

"Lucy!" he whispered. "Lucy! the hour is come. It is the Father's will. I dare resist no longer."

She gave a leap of animal terror and caught his hand. "O Mr. Bailey!" she gasped, "what is it?"

"Be calm, be calm," he told her. "I have taken

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all the blankets and the comfort off the spare bed and spread them out on the floor of the kitchen so as not to spot the floor. It's so hard to get out of woodwork. You take Eunice, and I'll take Ira. Be careful and don't make any noise. Don't wake them. Sh! then they will go right from their innocent sleep to the glories of heaven where their angels do always behold the face of the Father. They are innocent as yet, but how soon, oh, how soon to be contaminated by this world of sin!"

"Why, why, Mr. Bailey, what do you mean to do?" she gasped.

"I'll cut their throats, real quiet, real quiet. I've got the knife so sharp, so-o sharp they'll feel no pain at all. And the bedclothes will soak up all the blood. Yes, that's the best way. I've thought it all out. Now don't you say a word. But, O Lucy! I would fain this cup had passed from me. It is so hard to make the sacrifice."

Fear clutched at her heart, not for herself but for her children. With a heroism such as nerves heroes on the battlefield, she stilled the tremor in her voice and set herself to reason with him and coax the knife away from him. It would be presumptuous sin in them to interfere with the Almighty's plans. The children's lives were in God's hands. He knew it was a world of sin when He sent them into it, and what were they to interfere and call Him to account

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with, "Why do ye so?" Whom He did predestinate them He also called; and whom He called them He also justified; and whom He justified them He also glorified, so that without human let or hindrance all could work out to the greater honor and glory of God. She urged him to consider the matter further and do nothing without her. She talked with him till he quieted down and said, "I guess you're right, Lucy," and settled himself to sleep, but it was only a little while and he was walking the floor again and groaning: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!"

Day after day and especially night after night it was her task to devise new arguments and new excuses for delay. She had to be vigilant about the carving knife and take care not to let him be alone with the children for a moment, at the same time keeping it from them and from every one else, too. Why didn't she tell some one? Why didn't she tell the doctor and have her husband put where he could receive proper care and perhaps recover his mind?

In those days—in these days, insanity is less a disease than a disgrace. The afflicted are no longer regarded as possessed of devils, but they are tried and convicted by the same machinery as a thief and a murderer, and it was only the other day that we ceased treating them more cruelly than any felon.

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Fearful stories were told about the county house where the lunatics were kept; how they were fed on butchers' scraps stewed up; how they beat the poor things that didn't know any better. They used to pound the ends of old Charity Newton's fingers so that she couldn't pick up the pins she was forever trying to swallow, and they broke in the roof of old Mrs. Newsome's mouth with an iron spoon when she wouldn't eat. Mrs. Bailey could not bear to think of exposing her husband to the ridicule of the loafers around the courthouse. She could not bear to think of his being locked up with that silly boy of Makemsom's that used to beg for tobacco by pointing to his mouth and saying: "Ub-bub-bub-baa! Ub-bub-bub-baa!" If it had to come, it had to come, but till then she would have to wait. If anything happened to the children, why, why—it would happen to her, too.

Some days he was just like his old self and Eunice said to Ira: "Pa'th come back. And thay, Ira. I felt, and they wathn't noththring like you thaid."

"Well, then, he's got the false face pasted on," maintained Ira. "It ain't pa at all."

"Oh, yeth, he ith, too," declared Eunice. "Look how nithe he wath to-day."

"He was jist a-actin' like pa, that's all. My real pa, he never used to feel how big my neck was or put his finger on that place where it beats right by

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my jaw. Say, Eunice, did you know it beats there jist like it does on your wrist? Well, it does. Now you feel. Don't it? A-ah, what did I tell you?"

It was not so long to wait. The sermons on the angels with the trumpets were growing more and more fantastic in their imagery. The Searchers were amazed into silence. Only Brother Hollabaugh preserved his gift, but exercised it in so subdued a fashion that his low murmur, "O ya! O ya! Losh-cum-a-loshity wa-wa!" fitted itself to the high-pitched oratory of Mr. Bailey as the drone of a bag-pipe fits the chanter.

It was the Monday before the Saturday when he was to preach the last of the series on Revelations x, 7: "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets." Mrs. Bailey heard him declaiming: "Maranatha! Maranatha! The Lord cometh! And shall He find faith in the earth? Shall He find the Sabbath sanctified and remembered? Yes, there is a remnant which hath not bowed the knee to Baal—" And then the front door slammed and stillness followed. It was time for the children to come home from school. Suppose he should meet them! She wrung her hands out of the wash water, let down her skirts which she had kilted up, threw her shawl over her head, and started out to seek them. She

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went clear down to the Union schoolhouse and saw no signs of either parent or children. Miss Munsell said Ira and Eunice had both gone home, but search as she might she could not find them till she got to her own gate, when she saw them coming from the corner of Chillicothe Street.

"Why, where have you been?" she demanded. "You 'most scared the life out of me."

"Oh, jist down by Patterson's," said Ira and looked at his sister.

"What were you doing down by Patterson's? That's not on the road home. Did you see anything of your father?"

"You tell her, Euny," said the boy.

Eunice shook her head. For the first time, Mrs. Bailey noticed that the child was crying.

"What's the matter, Eunice? Has anybody been mean to you?"

The child shook her head again and catching hold of her mother's frock began to cry hard.

"Tell me what's the matter, Ira."

"When we was comin' home from school we seen a who' lot o' people runnin' into the alley back o' Patterson's, and they was laughin' like everything, and all the other children run there, and we run, too, 'cause we wanted to see what they was laughin' at. And this here man that pretends he's our pa, he was up on top the barn with a big, long tin horn in his

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hand a-blowin' on it and hollerin' that he was the seventh angel with the seventh trumpet, and everybody was makin' fun of him."

"Yes," whispered Mrs. Bailey, "and then what?"

"And the constable, he had a ladder up ag'in the barn and was goin' to climb up it when pa—you know, this man that pretends to be our pa—he commenced to flap his arms, makin' out he was flyin', and jumped off. He lit on a pile o' trash and stuff, and the crowd all hollered: 'Here he is!' and the constable got around there and took him off to the calaboose, and Mr. Horn, he said for God's sakes for somebody to take them little young ones——"

"O Ira! You thwored!" reproved Eunice.

"I didn't, either. I was jist tellin' ma what Mr. Horn said. He said for—you know—sakes to take them poor little young ones home, somebody, and not to let 'em see their daddy drug off to jail, and I told him he wasn't our real pa; that he was jist somebody with a false face on that looked like our real pa, and Mr. Horn said, 'O my Lord! ain't it awful?' and for us to run along home. And he ain't our real pa, is he?"

They were in the house now. Mrs. Bailey sank into a chair and threw her apron over her head, while she rocked to and fro, shaken by the billows of her grief. The children stood and looked at her while Ira per-

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sisted in his query: "Is he, ma? Is he our real pa? Ma, is he? O ma, is he? Tell me, is he?"

. . . . . .

As always in life, the blow when it fell was less terrible than the fear of it. Mrs. Bailey found that she could draw a long breath once more. The children were safe—at least, there were only the ordinary perils of being run over in the street or of catching the scarlet fever or diphtheria. Then the people were so kind, even the elders and the deacons who had been so hard on Mr. Bailey when he was tried by Presbytery, did everything they could for her. When it was known how miserably poor she and the children were they sent her groceries and coal and warm clothes to make over for Ira and Eunice and would not take "no" for an answer. She was a beautiful washer, too, and people from all over town sent her things they wanted done up carefully, and paid her well for it, so that, altogether, she made out right well. The "Searchers" kept far aloof, though. They had had a poor opinion of her from the first, as being out of sympathy with her gifted husband, and when it came out that he was insane, they were too much mortified to have anything to do with her. Even Aunt Betty Mooney tossed her head and held her peace for once. Alanson McKinnon was the only loyal one. He still kept the seventh day, and whenever he came to town he always

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brought her something, a bushel of potatoes or turnips or a barrel of apples. Hog-killing time he fetched in some spareribs. It didn't do any good for her to say that she had no claim on him and that she could not take his presents. He was the "settest" man in his ways in Logan County. He had made up his mind that he ought to give her these things and that ended it.

Neither was Mr. Bailey's existence so terrible as she had feared. Every two weeks she went out to visit him at the county house and took him things she thought he would like to eat. Otho Littell drove out there with a load of supplies, and she rode on the seat with him going and coming. Once Ira and Eunice went with her, but only once. Whenever she asked them after that if they didn't want to go and see pa they whined, "No-o, no-o." Now that he had his long hair cut close to his head with clippers and his beard shaved off he looked less like their pa than ever, and they would not go to him, though he begged them to. He jumped up and began to walk the floor of the long room, crying: "Unspotted from the world as yet, but, oh, how soon, how soon to be contaminated! Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

A big, thin negro slipped up to little Ira and muttered into his ear: "Boy, do you know who I am?"

"No, sir," whimpered Ira.

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"Why, I'm Jesus Christ. Didn't you know that? Hell, yes. Been him for ever and ever so long. That feller over there thinks he is too, but he's a fraud. He's no good. Say. Want a million dollars? Do you?"

"Go on away from there, Zeke," said Mr. Herkelrode, the poormaster. "Go on, now," and the negro slunk away, grumbling to himself. The silly boy twitched Eunice's apron and pointed to his mouth, babbling: "Ub-bub-bub-baa! 'Ub-bub-bub-baa!" In one corner of the room a man walked up and down with his hands pressed together in prayer, repeating over and over again the same words, and over and over again blessing himself: "O mairciful God, I beg of you notta let this day pass without saving my soul. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghostamin. O mairciful God! I beg of you notta let this day pass without saving my soul. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghostamin."

"I guess, if you don't mind, Miss' Bailey," said the troubled Mr. Littell in response to a motion of the head and a grimace from Mr. Herkelrode, "I'll take the children out to the wagon. You make out your visit to Mr. Bailey. I'll wait for you."

Mrs. Bailey satisfied herself that her husband had enough to eat and wear and a clean bed to sleep in. She had his library sent out so that he

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might not lack for reading matter, but he pined for freedom.

"'Woe is me,'" he quoted, "'that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar. My soul hath long dwelt among them that are enemies to peace. . . . Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more; and they are cut off from Thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. . . . Thou hast put away mine acquaintances from me; Thou hast made me an abomination unto them. I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. . . .' Aw, Lucy, won't you take me out? Aw, Lucy! I think you might. Please, Lucy, won't you? Aw, please? Why, Lucy, the people here are crazy. Folks'll think I'm crazy if I stay here. You don't think I'm crazy, do you, Lucy? I have so much to do before the mystery of God is finished. You know, I'm the angel with the seventh trumpet. You know that, don't you? And say. They won't let me have a knife to cut my nails with. Couldn't you get me a—come closer—couldn't you get me a little knife, a little, little one, and slip it to me, slip it to me when they ain't looking? You know that 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins,' and this is a dreadfully wicked place."

She had to put him off and quiet him the best she could. She knew how to talk to him.

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One morning Mr. Bailey did not come out of his room when it was unlocked. In some way he had wrenched the wire grating loose from his window and had climbed down a rope made from his bed sheet.

Mr. Herkelrode had one of the paupers hitch up the big wagon and drive to town with him right after breakfast. He pulled up in front of the little house where Mrs. Bailey lived. Little Curg Emerson, with his books under his arm, was at the front fence yodeling for Ira to come out. Mr. Herkelrode knocked at the front door, but there was no answer. He hearkened. There was a sonorous, masculine voice within reciting something. Between verses there was stillness. Mr. Herkelrode came down from the front porch very quietly and tiptoed around to the side window. He peeped in and stood staring. Then he sat down very suddenly with his head in his hands and gulped hard. Two or three times he tried to get up before he succeeded. When he came to the front fence he was as white as a sheet.

"Bub," he whispered to little Curg, "run down to the courthouse and get Constable Halloran. Tell him to come right quick. Tell him to bring his revolver. Tell him something awful has happened. When you go past the blacksmith shop, ask Mr. Perkypile if he won't hurry right up. Run now."

Then he went over to the pauper sitting in the

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wagon and nodded. "Drive across to that hitching post yan and tie up and come over here. Easy now." When the pauper came in at the gate Mr. Herkelrode said: "Don't make no noise. He's in there. You can look in if you want to. I don't. I got enough. Don't let him see you."

The man peeped in and came away trembling. "He had a chopping bowl full of something," he whispered, "and he was dipping his finger in it and sprinkling it on a kind of pulpit thing by the door. I heard him say something about the altar at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."

"Lord!" groaned Mr. Herkelrode, shaking his head. "He must have had a terrible time with her before he finished her. Prints of her hands all over the wall and he's jist covered with it. I bet she fought with him to keep him from the children. Did you see 'em? O my Lord! Hear him now."

"Accept, O Lord," the oratorical voice rang out, "this sacrifice of blood for the remission of sins. Bring these Thy servants into Thine everlasting habitations where—" There was a silence, and then a long, whimpering wail: "O that this cup might have passed from me!" and then the terrible sound of a man sobbing.

Mr. Herkelrode sighed: "I woosh't them men'd hurry up and come."

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M'REE HUTCHINS' HUSBAND

HARLEY RODEHAVER was walking down Center Street with the prettiest girl in Minuca Center. Her name was M'ree Hutchins. It was in the afternoon, and a warm June shower had just cleared away and left the sky a purple blue. In the spoonlike hollows of the red brick sidewalk little pools of water shuddered and made widening O's when sparkling drops fell from the clean, wet leaves above, where hid a robin singing ecstatically of love. The low-slanting rays of sunlight tangled in the spreading meshes of the girl's brown hair. The scarlet ribbon of her mouth parted in a flattered smile from her white incisors that crossed ever so little. She turned her head up to look at the tall young fellow who walked beside her, her firm-fleshed cheeks glowed with a color like azaleas, and her big, long-fringed eyes had the blue of gentian blossoms in them. Her skirt just showed her trim-set ankles and her pretty feet. Something about her, delicate but wholesome, made you look well at her while you might, as you look well at cherry trees in bloom.

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The robin overhead sounded the perfect octave of their mood. What they said we need not listen to—his labored compliments, her pouting, self-conscious: "Aw, yes, you! You tell that to every girl, I reckon." The words of love never do quite go to the tune of it.

She was Tom Hutchins' daughter. He owned the linseed-oil mills down by the depot, rich as cream, and thought the world and all of her. She had a younger brother, Sam, but he was such a wild, healthy, noisy creature that nobody in the house had a minute's peace while he was in it, whereas old Sallie, the housekeeper, and Nanno, the upstairs girl, worshiped and adored Miss M'ree and put up with all her bossy ways without a murmur. Such is the power of beauty. But she was a good-hearted little thing, too, and, for all her pa was well off and they kept two girls, she could cook and run the house as well as any poor girl, and her Battenberg was renowned.

In a pure democracy all the marriageable youths would have been her suitors, but Minuca Center is a strict plutocracy, so only those that were already of the nobility or that gave promise of "being somebody" some day dared approach. And not always these. There were worthy youths that sidled up to her at church socials and stammered out: "Please, may I be your company home?" only to

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have her turn away from them with a light titter at their presumption, while they slunk back with the sweat oozing from their palms and a prickling in the roots of their hair.

Mrs. Hutchins implanted these principles in her daughter's bosom as she had striven to implant them in her husband's. Both Tom and she had originally been Baptists, but as soon as he began to rise in the world she made him take a pew in the Episcopal church. She had very high ideas, Mrs. Hutchins had. She was an invalid. She suffered from a "complication," if you know what that is. The doctors couldn't tell what was the matter with her, and she had tried them all, even to that man down in Columbus that tells what will cure you just by holding a lock of your hair in his hand. They all did her good for a while, but not permanently, and she came to see that she was doomed to live a "shut-in" life. She bore her lot with patient resignation, though there were those that said she was just as well able to get up and go about her work as they were, only she was too plagued lazy to do anything but lie around and read novels and have people make a fuss over her. But nobody ever said that to Tom Hutchins. Every time he came into the house he went up to her room first thing and asked: "How you feeling, ma?"

Whatever she said or did was all right, and the

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only time in his life he ever crossed her was when he insisted that the baby should be named Mary, after his mother, who died when he was little, and his sister Mary, who had raised him. Mrs. Hutchins had chosen Genevieve—there was such a lovely character by that name in "The Earl's Proud Daughter," which she had just finished—but Tom said no, it would have to be Mary, and that ended it. Mrs. Hutchins softened the asperity of the old-fashioned name into Marie, pronounced with the accent on the last syllable—"M'ree." That was the way they called it in French, Mrs. Hutchins said.

M'ree had been calling on Minnie De Wees when Harley met her. She showed Minnie a diamond ring. Ed Coffinberry had given it to her. Yes, it was an engagement ring. Minnie is dreadfully plain-spoken at times. She asked M'ree right out: "M'ree, do you love him?" and looked at her very seriously. M'ree said: "W'y-y-y, course I do, goosie. Isn't it lovely? Cost eighty dollars. He bought it down to Columbus."

"Well, I reckon she does," Mrs. De Wees said, when Minnie told her about it—"much's she kin anybody. But laws! I pity the man that gets to be M'ree Hutchins' husband."

Now, Ed Coffinberry was not only ten years older than M'ree in age, but he was forty years older than her in his ways. He was the cashier of the Farmers'

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National Bank, and was already looked up to by all. He was solemn and serious enough to be President of the United States. He dressed well, but with a punctilious sobriety that captured confidence and held it as a magnet captures and holds a needle. He was smooth-shaven, rather lean about the jaws, parted his ashy-blond hair smoothly on one side, and had a clear, steady eye, a thin, straight nose, straight eyebrows, and what is called "a noble forehead." He rarely smiled. He was a listener of the first order of merit, and a man of few words, but those well chosen and extremely sensible. People liked to get his opinion of things. It was plain to see he was destined to rise in the world, to "be somebody."

What Ed Coffinberry saw in M'ree was a mystery to some. I know. A man is not always wise. Under that cold exterior lurked a passion fierce, intense. Others had looked upon Tom Hutchins' daughter and wished for her; Ed Coffinberry set his teeth and vowed to possess her. Something of his purpose looked out of his steel-blue eyes and fascinated her with a sense of his power. They say the women like a man that can boss them. He was just that kind —a faithful husband, but the one to rule his own house.

Now, M'ree also ruled her own house. She did not think it all out in so many words, but there were moments when she felt a sort of rebellion. When Ed

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looked at her she just had to do as he said, and she wasn't sure she was going to like that always. And then the love making had been so pitifully brief and uneventful. Of course she liked him, and all that, and he liked her, but she wished she had left him dangling a while, and had not said "Yes," quite so soon. It seemed kind of an imposition to ask her to settle down to housekeeping without going around more, seeing more fellows, and all like that. She had been to the governor's inauguration ball down at Columbus the year before, but that was so long ago; she was only a girl then. A subtle discontent assailed her.

She didn't show her engagement ring to Harley Rodehaver. She liked him; he was real nice, so tall and strong, and he had such pretty eyes. Dark eyes they were, kind of sad and mournful, although he was a regular cut-up. They reminded her of—er—of —er—oh, you know! That fellow in "Strathmore."

Harley had been graduated from Otterbein University the year before—there is a university every four miles in Ohio—and had come to Minuca Center to read law with his Uncle John, Judge Rodehaver. He had been very diligent and had delighted the old gentleman with his intelligence and his industry, but it was summer now and he was relaxing somewhat. He was a fine tennis player, and he could pick a banjo and sing college songs to per-

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fection. But it was when he turned his full and vibrant barytone to songs like "Because I Love You, Dear," that the cold shivers ran all over you and you felt sort of sorry about something, you didn't know what, unless it was that your life was empty and that more was coming to you by rights than you ever would get. Mrs. Hutchins often invited him to come and sing for a poor "shut-in." He used to go up and visit her, and once she kissed him for his poor, dead mother, whom she had never seen or heard tell of before.

Ed Coffinberry did not like it very well that Harley called so often, but what could he do? They had two or three little tiffs about it, but Ed always got M'ree's eye, and she made it up with him. But the grand flare-up came when the younger crowd got up a straw ride and dance out at Silver Lake and invited M'ree. Ed was invited, too, though it wasn't quite his set, but when he heard Harley was to be there he told her she shouldn't go a step. Anyhow, his people were strict Methodists, as are most of the inhabitants of Logan County, and as cashier of the bank it wouldn't do for him to attend.

"What's the reason I can't go?" demanded M'ree angrily. "What have you got to say about it? Since when did you get to be my boss?"

Ed's eyes looked very serious as he answered: "I'm not trying to boss you, dearie. I am only say-

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ing that I don't think it proper for you when you are engaged to me——"

"Think I'm going to poke round home all the time and never go any place or see anything just because I'm engaged to you? Well, I guess not. I guess not. I think you're a little previous with your *authority*, Mr. Coffinberry. I'd like to know what there is about a little dance among the young people that isn't 'proper' as you call it."

Remembering what he had heard the preachers say about the unabashed and shameless license of the ballroom, Ed began: "Don't you think it's wrong for a girl to let herself be hugged by a fellow while they go capering around a room, away out there at Silver Lake at all hours of the night——"

"Who are you talking to?" she stormed, scarlet with rage at the prurient prudery the man displayed. "Do you think I'd let anybody hug me? In public, that is. You don't know what you're talking about. You think——"

"That's what they do at dances. They——"

"No, they don't, either—now. In the square dances and in the two-steps and waltzes the gentleman——"

"Well, M'ree," he said, "we won't discuss it. I don't think a girl with any self-respect would——"

"Do you think my pa would let me dance if he thought it wasn't respectable? My ma taught me to

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dance when I was a little thing, before she took down sick. I guess they know as much about what's respectable and what isn't as you do. Oh, I'm disgusted with you!"

"M'ree—" he began.

"If you think I'm the kind that would act the way you said, what do you want to marry me for? And, furthermore, if you're going to make a fuss every time there's any little party or anything, why, we'll just consider the engagement at an end, Mr. Coffinberry."

She made her mouth a straight line, lifted her eyebrows, and almost shut her eyes as she slowly turned her head from him and his magnetic gaze till she steadfastly regarded the Rogers group, "Weighing the Baby," on a stand by the front window, in full view of the street when the shades were up.

"Do you mean that, M'ree?" he asked solemnly, vainly trying to catch her eye.

She tapped her tiny foot impatiently, just like *Bessie* in "Bessie's Secret," but made no other answer.

"M'ree, do you mean that?"

"Please address me as Miss Hutchins. Yes, I do mean that."

He rose. "Good-by, M'ree," he said.

"Good-by."

He walked out in the hall very slowly. He ex-

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pected her to call him back. With grave deliberation he put on his hat and moved toward the door. He turned the doorknob. She spoke. He listened. She said: "Hope I never see you again!" He couldn't see her, but as the door slammed she made a face at him.

She was provoked at herself, though, the next second. It was such a spiteful thing to say. And to make a face at him! Well, she told her mother, she knew it was awful to act that way, but she was *so* mad at him. Talk like that to *her*. Huh! Well!

"You'll have to give him his ring back," said Mrs. Hutchins.

"Laws! I never thought about it. I don't care. I don't want his old ring if I've got to take him with it. My heavens!"

"It's a real nice ring."

"Yes, kind of." She looked at it as it bristled with spikes of particolored light. "I oughtn't to talk to you, ought I, ma? Gets you all upset and nervous. Well, I'm not going to bother my head any more about it. Just dismiss it from my thoughts. Good night, ma. I'm going to take the ring off and send it back to him to-morrow—if I think of it."

The next day she met Harley at Palmer's, playing tennis. He asked her if she was going to the dance. She said she was afraid not. She'd like to, awfully, but she couldn't go *alone* very well, and——

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Quite a crowd went out to the lake; rode over in two big wagons, and had a gay time. Never got home till daylight. There was a big talk about it, for most of the girls and some of the boys belonged to Center Street M. E. Old Uncle Billy Nicholson went about like a roaring lion, demanding that the offenders be "churched," every last one of them. He said it was just awful, the way Methodists were getting so worldly. They didn't pay any more attention to the "Disc*ip*line" than if there wasn't such a book. But it was generally agreed that the easiest way was the best way. It would have about depopulated the Epworth League if the dancers had been put out of the church. Uncle Billy was all right, but he was kind of old fogy. He didn't believe in letting the women folks wear feathers or artificial flowers; he was against an organ and a choir in the church; he didn't believe in Christmas trees or oyster suppers or strawberry festivals or anything. Oh, religion, of course. He believed in that. You know what I mean.

People were so busy talking about it, though, that they quite overlooked how constantly Harley Rodehaver was with M'ree Hutchins the week after the dance, calling every evening and walking with her afternoons.

One day they went over to the B. & I. depot just about the time the south-bound accommodation was

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due. They stood at the far end of the platform, Harley talking very earnestly and pleadingly, and M'ree poking at a crack in the boards with her parasol. Finally, just as the train whistled, she looked up and said: "Well, all right," and Harley bought two round-trip tickets to Marysville, the county seat of Knox, which is the next county to Logan.

Now, Henry Wolf, the county clerk of Knox, was a great political friend of Tom Hutchins, and when Harley gave M'ree's name when he applied for the license, Henry asked: "Tom Hutchins' daughter?"

Harley said: "Yes."

"How old is the lady?"

"Nineteen, aren't you, M'ree?"—scowling at her and nodding ever so slightly. But M'ree was looking at a real handsome fellow across the hall in the recorder's office, and she answered: "Why, no; I won't be eighteen till the fourteenth of next month."

"Just excuse me a moment," said Henry, and stepped into the next room, closing the door after him. There was a long-distance telephone in there.

"Why didn't you tell him you were nineteen?" whispered Harley.

"Well, but, Harley, I'm not."

"But you could have said you were, couldn't you?"

"O Harley, and tell a story?" She opened her

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big eyes, as if all her life she had done nothing but tell the truth.

After a long time Mr. Wolf came back. He stood at the counter, upending his pencil and pushing it through his fingers and then upending it again. "If I was you two," he said finally, "I'd go talk it over with the old folks. You got lots o' time. You don't need to be in no hurry. You're both young yet."

Harley said they wanted to get married right away.

"Well, I don't know how you kin," said Henry. "Not in this county, anyways. Because they won't marry you without a license, and I ain't agoing to give you one."

"Why not?" demanded Harley.

"You don't want no secret marriage. It looks awful green, really it does. And it makes all kinds of trouble afterwards when—" He stopped and looked at M'ree. She turned her back to him and began to blush. Harley got red, too. "Why not? Well, I tell you why not. Because her pa says 'No,' and for you two to come right straight back home. Tom Hutchins is my friend, and for that reason, if for no other, I wouldn't give you the license. Now, you take my advice, and——"

"Come on, M'ree," said Harley, and pushed her out of the office.

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"Better go on back home!" Henry called out after them, and as they got out on the sidewalk they could hear him laughingly evading the questions of the clerks as to what was up.

At the depot Harley asked what the fare was to Mechanicsburg, the county seat of Miami, the next one to Knox. When he came to count up his money he found that by the time he had bought two tickets and paid for the license he would not have more than $1.80 to pay the minister with. Besides, they wouldn't get to Mechanicsburg until after the clerk's office had closed for the day.

The situation was awful. Harley walked up and down the platform, scowling and biting his lips. All of a sudden M'ree began to cry. He took her to his bosom and patted her back soothingly.

"Pa'll scold me," she sniffed. "I just know he will."

"Never mind, my darling," Harley said, in his deep, tender voice. "Never mind. I will be there to protect you, your husband"—she thrilled—"your husband in the sight of Gawd." He expelled his breath and drew it in again through his clinched teeth: "Ah! Shee-ee-ee! This is terrible! To have the cup of happiness pressed to one's very lips and then to have it dashed away! Gee!" He shook his head in the bitterness of his anguish.

"O Ame! Say, Amos!" yelled the station agent

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to a man rattling by on a wagon. "When you go by Hoover's, tell him they's a——"

"Whoa, John! Whoa, Molly! Whoa, there! So! Stand still, can't you? What say?"

"W'y, I said for you to stop and tell Jim Hoover when you go by there they's a kag o' bolts come up from C'lumbus for him on Thirty-three." The station agent's voice rapidly sank from a bellow to a parlor tone as he walked over to the wagon. He gave a sharp backward twitch of his head to call Amos's attention to the young couple on the platform. He put his foot up on the hub of the front wheel.

"Got it bad, ain't they?" said Amos.

"O laws! Y'ort to *hear* 'em. 'Don't cry, darlin', don't cry. I'll purtect ye!'"

"Git out!"

"Honest to God. Oh, sick'nin', jist sick'nin'."

"I jing! I woosh 'twas me she had hugged up thataway!" And Amos cackled the falsetto laugh that men use at certain times.

"Know who she is?" whispered the station agent. "That's Tom Hutchins' girl, up to the Center. From what I could gather, him and her has run off to git married and kind o' slipped up on it. I'm goin' to telefoam up to Hannigan on the *Examiner* and put him onto it."

Three long-legged boys in big, droopy, straw-pile

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hats, barefooted, wearing hickory shirts and brown apron-front overalls with straps over the shoulders, sidled up and stared at Harley and M'ree. From time to time they shut their mouths to swallow, and then let them fall open again.

"We have our love for solace in this trying hour," said Harley, blind to all else but the girl on his bosom. "Haven't we, dearest? Say that you love me, won't you, pet? Say it again! Go on away, you! Skip, now!" Scared by the peremptory stamp of his foot, the boys retreated a little space and then halted, staring and inching nearer, lured by the fascinating sight.

"Let's get away from this rabble," said Harley, with stinging emphasis, and they went into the station. Some of the boys went around to the back and built up a precarious pedestal of brickbats, on which they took turns standing and peering through the grimy window. Others stayed on the platform about the door. Part of a head and one glaring eye would stealthily grow out from the door jamb and then swiftly vanish, only to grow again. Other boys came. The couple, sitting far apart, could hear them whisper.

It was very still.

The roosters crowed a great deal.

The mob of boys, soft-footed and silent, attended them to the train and watched them to their seat.

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When the train drew out, a shrill, derisive chorus followed. It was a mile before Harley laid his arm along the back of the seat, and two miles before M'ree got a cinder in her eye.

Mr. Hutchins was waiting for them with a closed carriage. He took them home in silence. After dinner they all went into the library. Harley braced himself when Mr. Hutchins began: "Now, young man." It was what he expected to hear. How was he going to support a wife? He had no trade, no profession. He could not reasonably expect to support himself, let alone a wife, by practicing law for three years at the very least calculation. Better say five years. And if he thought—if he thought for one minute that Tom Hutchins was going to keep him in idleness, why, the sooner he got that notion out of his head the better. To all of this Harley had one all-sufficing answer: He loved M'ree and M'ree loved him, didn't she? Yes. Well. And what was life without love? Harley made a most eloquent address. He was even moving Tom Hutchins a little when the bell rang. Starched skirts rustled away from the library door, and presently Nanno announced: "Misther Hannigan, of th' *Examiner*, have called for oo, sor."

When Mr. Hutchins returned from a rather exciting interview, he found the two demurely seated on opposite sides of the room. Harley laid aside

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"The Royal Path of Life" and looked up inquiringly at Mr. Hutchins as he entered.

"Well, you're in for it now," said Mr. Hutchins surlily. "Since you were so keen to get married in a hurry and without any flubdub, that's the way it'll be. To-morrow evening, in the house here, seven-thirty, by Mr. Courtney. Take the nine o'clock train to Niagara Falls and back here in a week. After that"—he drew his hand over his eyes thoughtfully —"well, we'll see."

Harley shook his hand in a transport of delight, and M'ree kissed her father, who was more moved thereat than she was.

Mrs. Hutchins lamented that there was to be no grand public function and no chance to prepare M'ree's trousseau, but for the second time in his life Tom Hutchins was inexorable. Only two or three girl friends of M'ree's, Aunt Hannah and Uncle George, Judge and Mrs. Rodehaver, and Mr. Courtney and his wife. (She always went along to fix his surplice for him.) M'ree could wear that *mousseline de soie* of hers. It might be a little longer and not hurt any, but it would have to do. She could wear her confirmation veil. Mr. Hutchins would see about getting the license and telling the rector.

It occurred to M'ree the next day, while she was packing her trunk, that to slip off and get married in a hurry was one thing, and to be made to get mar-

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ried in a hurry by her pa was quite another thing. Harley was the ideal romantic lover, but those awful boys down at Marysville! And there right before her in the bureau drawer was Ed Coffinberry's ring, that she had forgotten to send back to him!

With her eyes still wet and her chest still jumping convulsively from her hard crying spell, she sat down and wrote a note to Ed, returning the ring. She could not keep it, as she was to be married to Harley Rodehaver that night. Swimming in a wave of recurring tears, she added: "Forgive me. Good-by, forever!" and I am not sure but a drop or two fell on the paper. It seemed to her a very solemn and responsible thing, and she was quite sharp with Sam when he whined about carrying the note, protesting that he had been running "urnts" for her all morning, and he was just sick and tired of being her "nigger." But he went, and in an astonishingly short space of time was back, breathlessly informing her that Ed had given him a dollar to run all the way home with an answer. "Did, too. Every step—or prett' near every step. Is he comin' to your weddin'?"

The answer entreated, adjured, pleaded, implored that M'ree should come down to the bank at once. Only he and Jerry, the messenger, were there; all the others were gone to lunch; so he couldn't leave, and he couldn't wait till the bank closed to see her,

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to beg her pardon for the way he had acted two weeks ago Sunday night. He never thought she would take it so to heart. Oh, he had been a brute to act so! But would she not come and say one last word of forgiveness? It was the last time. (All the tender pathos that is in that phrase, "the last time," overflowed her soul as she read.) The awful tidings had fallen upon him like a thunderbolt. Oh, forgive him! Oh, please, please come at once!

"Poor man!" she sighed, and put her thumb under her chin and her forefinger tip against her teeth. Then she roused herself and got her hat.

"I'm just going down to Galbraith's for something, ma," she called out, at the foot of the stairs. "I won't be but a minute."

"Well, hurry right back. You know you've got lots to do, and Sallie and Nanno have all they can 'tend to. And *I* can't do anything. O me! I wish your pa had put it off for a month. So many things to look after!" But the door had shut, and Mrs. Hutchins returned to her novel with a sigh.

Ed took her into the directors' room. She meant to say only a few words, but before she knew it all the details of that horrid Marysville trip were out. She was so thankful that Ed didn't see anything to laugh at in it. If there had been one twinkle in those grave, reproachful eyes when she sobbed out how the boys had piled up brickbats to peep in at them,

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she would have just *hated* him. Ed might not be so romantic as Harley, but he would never do anything ridiculous. There was something so protecting in Ed, and then he looked at her so, and the next thing was, Jerry was off to Judge Rodehaver's office with a note for Harley, saying that it was all a terrible mistake. She could never marry him. And for him please not to call.

Dr. Avery had gone away, and Mrs. Hutchins was resting easier. M'ree had locked herself up in her room. The storm of Mr. Hutchins' anger had spent itself, and he sat by his wife's bedside rocking and reading over and over again the account in the *Evening Examiner* from the pen of the gifted Hannigan, telling how "the hand of the beautiful and accomplished Miss Marie Hutchins, the acknowledged belle of Minuca Center, had been won by one of the most talented young limbs of the law, Mr. Harley Rodehaver, who has recently come into our midst." The Marysville trip was there, tricked out in all the tawdry splendor of Laura Jean Libbey and Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations." At the end was the announcement that "the nuptial ceremonies were to be consummated this evening by Reverend Courtney, rector of St. John's P. E. Church, at the palatial residence of the bride's father, on South Mad River Street, Colonel Thomas P. Hutchins." All that

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was bad enough, but now— He groaned and looked at his wife, who was quietly sleeping. Sulphonal had brought surcease of sorrow for her. Everybody would read that and crow over it, and the next day they would find out what M'ree had done, and they would crow more than ever. He would be ashamed to look people in the face. And then he remembered with a jerk that Hannigan was the *Enquirer* correspondent and would just spread himself. It wasn't often he got such a chance. The red and sullen flush of shame mantled his face and met upon his neck as he thought how not only his own townsmen but all that knew him commercially and politically in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, would read the flaming story. He was able to see, clairvoyantly, low, lecherous sots bandying his daughter's name in barrooms and cackling the falsetto laugh that men use at certain times. His fists clinched. She was a good girl, kind to her mother and all that. Nobody could say a word against her character. Not a word. And that she should have brought this humiliation upon his name! He had been so proud of her. What possessed the girl to go and act that way?

And now he had to get up some kind of a lie to tell the folks when they came. He wasn't much used to lying, and a cold sickness assailed the pit of his stomach as he thought of himself standing before those prying, doubting eyes, eager to put the

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worst construction on everything. He knew they would not believe him then; he knew they would find him out when the *Enquirer* came up on No. 1 and everybody bought it. But he couldn't tell them the truth now. He couldn't face them and say what a fool his daughter had made of herself and of him.

He heard Uncle George and Aunt Hannah come in, Uncle George with his loud, boisterous voice, and Aunt Hannah telling Sallie she had brought her apron so she could help with the things. He heard Minnie De Wees explain to Nanno that she had come early so as to run over the wedding march on their piano, and a stray note or two floated up the stairs as she fingered the keys with the soft pedal on. He tried to think what he should say, to learn it by heart. He had just thought it might do to tell them that, on account of her ma's delicate health, M'ree had decided not to leave her for the present, when he heard the shrill chirrup of girls' voices and the ponderous orotund of Mr. Courtney's Anglo-Buckeye accent in all its "powurrrrr and commaundment," choiring antiphonally their mutual surprise at meeting at the gate. Then Nanno called up: "Misther Hootchins! Oo're wanted, plase."

A cold sweat broke out on him. He nerved himself and went down the stairs as one goes to the gallows.

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"How do I look, John?" asked Mrs. Rodehaver, when the judge came home. "Do you think this old black silk will do to go in? They're such bigbugs. I got kind of a cold piece ready. I thought it wouldn't do to go there ravenous hungry. Set up, now, and then hurry and get yourself ready. W'y, what's the matter? What makes you look at me so funny?"

"Didn't Harley tell you?"

"W'y, no! Tell me what? He come in and went right up to his room. O John, is anything wrong? Has he been doin' anything? O John, if he has, I'll never git over it. He's been like my own son to me."

"Harley's all right. It's her."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"She's backed out."

"Aw!"

"Yes, sir. Says it's all a turrable mistake, and she don't want to see him no more. Harley showed it to me."

"Well, I'm jist glad of it. Now! She'd 'a' never done for him. Never."

"Dad-blamed little hussy! I'd like to smack her!"

"Oh, well, now, John, mebby it's all for the best. She never would 'a' done for him. I seen that from the start."

"Don't I know that? It's the best thing could 'a' happened. But——"

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"I *thought* he looked turrable downhearted when he come in, but, thinks I——"

"Vine, I want you should go talk to him. I was goin' to, but it ain't no jury case, and I'd git it all hindside before. You better do it." He began to walk the floor with his hands behind him. "Viney," he said, "it's the turnin'-point in his life, if he only can see it. He was a boy yesterday; he's a man to-day. He's ben a-dreamin'; he's awake now. He thinks his heart is broke because she won't have him. Well, now, that ain't it at all. No, sir. He's ben actin' the gilly, with all this calf love, and now he sees it, and jist because he's got the real, high-strung nature in him, he's mortified to death. Ah! These here men that never act the fool and never do anything to be ashamed of, I got no use for 'em. I wouldn't give a damn for 'em!"

"John!"

"No, sir, I wouldn't. Viney, do you know, I was afraid he *wouldn't* git into a scrape like this till it was too late! It's like the measles—goes hard with you if you ketch it when you're growed up. W'y, Viney, I never see anybody with such a head for the law business as that boy has. Wonderful! I knowed he'd do well enough when it come to office practice, but I wanted him to be strong before a jury. Now he kin be. He's suffered. I ackshilly worried about him for fear he'd git to be thirty-five or forty and

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then git struck after some fool girl like this one. Oh, it's the best thing could 'a' happened! Bless the Lord! I'm damn' glad of it!"

"W'y, John! I don't know what's come over you, talkin' like that!"

"You tell him, jist as easy as you kin, Vine, 'at he don't want no pretty poppet for a wife. He wants a woman." He drew her withered bosom to his and kissed her wrinkled forehead. "He wants a woman that's got good sense and a faithful, lovin' heart; that'll be to him what you've ben to me all these years, Viney."

"Oh, I——"

"What 'u'd 'a' ever become o' me, only for you?" he asked. His chin trembled. The lovelight of bygone years relumed his eyes. "Lord!" he said chokingly, and stroked her thin locks.

"Do you mind how we looked up your verse, Viney? You know you was born on the eleventh of the month. 'She shall do him good and not evil all the days of her life.' Well, you have, you have. I'd kind o' like Harley to git a wife like that." He stood silent awhile, and then said, as steadily as he could: "Don't he ever make you think o' Johnnie, or what he'd 'a' ben if we'd 'a' raised him? He does me."

"O pap!" she cried, and trembled all over. "Had you noticed it, too?"

"Well, mother," he said, when he had drawn a

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long, quivering breath—they had not used those names to each other for many a year—" well, mother, I expect you better go up and talk to him. Kind o'—kind o' go easy with him, I would. Jist the same as if he was Johnnie."

He heard her climb the stairs, slow and clumsy with age. She entered the room where the young man sat at the table in the gloom, with his cheek distorted by the pressure of the hand he leaned against. The judge heard the fluty notes of her old voice, and, after a long talk, a plangent word or two in the deep, vibrant notes of the youth. His answers came more frequently as the soft voice went on. Then there was the bell-like tone of the pitcher striking the wash bowl, and the plash of water. The old judge smiled.

" I put the teakittle on for you, mother," he said, when they came downstairs. " I see the s'preme court has reversed the ruling of the lower court in the Lohmeyer case. I thought 'twould be about that way. You see"—and he went on, as if the Lohmeyer case was the only thing on earth.

But at bedtime he put out his hand to Harley and said: " Your career's all before you now. By George! I woosh 'twas me. S'posin' you'd 'a' got her, what 'u'd you 'a' ben? Nothin' in the world but M'ree Hutchins' husband."

I hear she has been engaged to four or five since she broke off with Ed Coffinberry the last time.

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THE WARNING

"WELL, I don't know," said Almeda Carey, as she bit off the end of the thread and twisted it into a point for the eye of her needle; "they's a good many things 'at we can't account for, but I don't know. I ain't one o' them that says that when you're dead that's the last of you, but I believe that if a body's gone to the Good Place, look like to me they wouldn't *want* to come back, and if they're gone to the Bad Place, why, they couldn't *git* back. How was you thinkin' o' havin' it made?"

"Why, I don't know. How would you? I b'lieve I'll have the front of it shirred. I seen old lady Parker with her new waist that way, and I thought it looked right becomin'. I priced that black-and-white taffety down to Galbraith's a week ago yesterday when I was gettin' the wrapper I sent to Molly. A dollar a yard it was. 'Twould take about five yards, I s'pose."

"No," responded Almeda, "not now no more. I should think about four yards would do you. Four

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and a quarter would be full as much as you'd need. Stripe or check?"

"Check," said Mrs. Coulter, pausing in her meditative rocking to look around. "Your fashion paper come yet? I thought mebby if it had you could show me about how you'd make it; but never mind. You know 'bout what I want—something kind o' stylish and yet not too flirty. Pa he alwus wants me to dress real gay, but I tell him anybody that's a grandmother, or as good as one——"

"How *is* Molly?"

"I got a letter from her yesterday, and she said she was real well, but very anxious for me to get down to Columbus so as to be there in good season. And I thought if you could get the waist done in time I'd wear it down there. I feel awful worried for the poor child. Night before last I had a ringin' in my ear, and you know they used to say that was a sign they'd be a death in the family before long, and I just wondered if that was for Molly. Wouldn't it be terrible if she was to be taken away right now? I believe it would just about kill Jim. He thinks the world an' all o' her."

"Aw, pshaw! Elnora, you ain't at yourself!" reproved the dressmaker, hitching her chair closer to the window. "The days is gittin' lots shorter, ain't they?"

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Coulter. "I alwus dread to

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have fall come. It's so gloomy. Dark days this time o' year gives me the blues the worst way. Look like the sky kind o' glowers at you, much as to say: 'Whutch you doin' hyer, anyways? Whut right 'a' you got to look up?' I feel kind o' like hunchin' up my shoulders to dodge the lick."

"Aw, well, now, I wouldn't give way that way, Elnora," said Almeda soothingly. "I wouldn't borry no troubles, if I was you. We're all in the hands of the Good Man and He knows what's best fer each an' all of us. Molly's a strong, healthy girl and she'll be all right. If I was you I wouldn't worry one speck. Don't you think that's a pretty tol'able high price for that taffety? I seen some black-and-white check in to Rosenthal's fer eighty-nine cents."

"Yes, I looked at that, but it's so kind o' slazy; and, anyways, if I go down to Columbus I want to go lookin' nice and feelin' nice—feelin' as if it was good goods I was wearin'."

"Well," said Almeda Carey, and bit off another length of thread, "we've all got to go when our time comes, warnin' or no warnin'. I've heard a heap about folks appearin' to their friends fur away just as they was leavin' the body, and to hear old Mis' Doctor Cooper talk you'd think it was an everyday occurrence for them that's gone before to come back; but I take notice they hain't none of 'em come back for me. I woosh't they had. I'd just give

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anything if he could 'a' come back and told me whatever became of him, whether he was killed on the field of battle or died in one o' them prisons, or what. Seems like, for a while there, I jist couldn't hardly stand it to be kept in suspense with nothin' to do but wait and wait and wait, not knowin' anything about him but jist what the *Republican* said—'Missin'.' I used to beg and pray the Good Man to let him come back to me, if it was only for a minute. But he never did. Seems like it wasn't to be."

The withered old mantuamaker leaned back in her chair and looked out into the gray November landscape. Its shadows darkened fast, but she looked back to youth, where it is always sunny, and beheld again that morning in the spring of '62 with its light winking and glittering on the bayonets of the Ninety-seventh Ohio, swinging to the tune of "The girl I left behind me," on its way down to the old B. & I. depot, and one bright, smiling face with shining brown hair curling out from under a jaunty cap. She had an old daguerreotype of him in his soldier clothes and a lock of that curling hair, three letters, and a clipping containing the words, "George D. Batchelder, missing"—and that was all, all except the memory of a great grief.

"And the night before old Squire Nicholls died," she wakened to hear Elnora saying, "you know Mis' Nicholls telegraphed to the two boys to come, and

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Jennie come up from Dresden, and the old squire he was so provoked at them fer comin' and spendin' all that money on railroad fares. He said he was all right, only a little under the weather, and ackshilly got up and out o' bed and smoked a cigar with Hen to show how well he was. And after they went to bed and Mis' Nicholls was settin' up with him, 'long about twelve o'clock there come three raps—sounded like it was on the foot of the bed—and she says, 'Pap, did you hear that?' And he was kind o' dozin', but he opened his eyes and says: 'Yes,' he says, 'I did, Lizzie. They've come for me. Call the children.' And 'long about four o'clock he died. And Emerson's dog howled all night long right under their window. They say it was terrible."

The white eyeballs of Marilla Andrews, Miss Carey's apprentice, shone in the gloom. In the silence that followed the two women could hear the girl fetch a long breath and let it go in a trembling sigh.

"Marilla, I woosh't you'd light the light," said Almeda, "and whilst you're up you might go out to the coal house and bring in a bucket o' coal. The fire is gittin' low. Take the kitchen lamp with you; I would."

After the girl had gone out Almeda said to Mrs. Coulter: "She's the scariest thing I ever saw in my born days. She's plumb afraid of the dark as any

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little young one. Course I had to have somebody with me, livin' all alone this way, but, lawsadaisy! come good and dark she's all on strings. Might as well have nobody at all. You didn't want a high collar to that waist, did you, Elnora?"

"Land! How'd I look with one on? Never did have any neck to speak of, and now't I'm gittin'— My Lord! 'Mede, what's that?"

The outer door of the sitting room in which they were opened slowly and swung inward. Mrs. Coulter sank back in her chair with an "Oh!" Almeda got up and shut the door.

"Plague the thing!" she said. "Jist here lately it's taken to actin' up. Least little jar it flies open. Every time I think I'll shorely have that ketch fixed and I keep forgittin' it. Shirring you said you wanted across the front, didn't you? Why, what's the matter, Elnora? Ain't you feelin' well?"

"I had a kind of distress right here," answered Mrs. Coulter, putting her hand to her heart and leaning back with her eyes closed.

"Don't you want I should get you something? I got some real good whisky in the house. Mebbe if you was to take a little sup you'd feel better."

"No. No. No, thank you. No, I'll be over it in a minute. It never lasts but a little while. There. It's gone now. Well really I must be gettin' along. It's most supper time now and pa'll be home, and that

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hired girl o' mine ain't worth her salt. You know that china sugar bowl o' mine that Aunt Emmeline gimme? Oh, yes, you do too; the one with the gilt flowers on it. Well, sir, she broke it all to flinders and I wouldn't have had it happen for a pretty. Oh, yes, I'm lots better."

The two friends moved to the front door and lingered there chatting for a while, the poor little old dressmaker and Silas Coulter's wife, she that was Elnora Potter. From some trivial thing, Mrs. Coulter broke off to say: "Almeda, you an' me has been thicker'n Cherry an' Brindle ever since we was little girls and played 'keep house' together. Of course I got Silas, but he's a man, and now, since Molly's married and gone to live at Columbus, seems like they ain't nobody so near to me as what you are. Le's make it up that whichever one of us is called first shall come and tell the other."

"Why, what made you think of that, Elnora?"

"I don't know. It just kind of come into my head. Will you? I will, if you will."

"I will if I can," promised Almeda, and gave her hand upon it.

"Well, then, it's a bargain," said Mrs. Coulter, and, moved by a sudden impulse, she pulled the mantuamaker to her and kissed her.

"Why, Elnora! Look out what you're doing! Now, what if you should ha' knocked that lamp out

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o' my hand! We might both of us— Marilla'll think I got a beau. When did you want the waist done?"

"Lemme see. This is Thursday. If I should bring you the goods to-morrow d'you s'pose you could get it made up in a week?"

"In a week," mused Almeda. "There's that suit of Mrs. Avery's I promised for Thursday, and that dress o'—but that can wait. Yes, I guess so. A week from to-day. All right. Can you see the steps? Well, good night."

She held up the lamp so that Mrs. Coulter could see to get down the ten steps to the street level, and then shut and locked the parlor door. As she came out into the sitting room the side door slowly swung open.

"Plague take that door!" she said peevishly, as she slammed and bolted it. "Marilla, remind me of it to have that ketch fixed. It gives me the all-overs flyin' open that way. I think sure it's somebody comin' in. Well, what'll we have for supper?"

Next afternoon Mrs. Coulter brought the taffeta and Almeda cut out the lining, basted it together, and fitted it.

"Now I can have it ready to try on you Monday," she said. "When you goin' to Columbus?"

"I wrote I'd be down Friday morning, no preventing Providence. I sent her a piece of the goods.

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Now I don't want you should overwork on my account, but if you *could* get it done so's I could wear it Friday, why— Looks right nice, don't it?"

"Well, you be in on Monday to try on. How you feelin'?"

"Why, I'm well enough."

But when Monday came, Lide Strayer, and her mother from DeGraff, called and stayed to tea, and Mrs. Coulter could not leave. Almeda was going to send Marilla up with the waist, but old Aunt Libby Nicholson brought in a dress pattern, and she was so particular and such a talker that she took up the whole afternoon of both women. Mrs. Avery sent word to be sure and have her suit ready by Thursday, as George was going to the meeting of the Ohio State Medical Society up to Cleveland and wanted her to go along; so if the dressmaker's lamps burned far into the night there was good reason for it.

When Mrs. Coulter came next day she said she had received a letter from Molly and she thought the goods was just lovely and that they looked for her Friday morning sure, and for her not to fail them. Jim would be at the Union Depot to meet her.

"But do you know—I declare I'm gettin' kind o' foolish—I'm jist bound I won't go without that waist. Ain't it pretty? That shirrin' 'll set it off, too,

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won't it? Do you think it's jist right in the back? Seems to me it's kind o'——"

Marilla was a first-rate girl, or would have been if she didn't get to talking sometimes and do things wrong end to and never find it out till she was nearly done, and then have to rip it all out again. There were a good many little annoyances of one kind or another, so it was just at dusk Thursday evening that Almeda got around to Mrs. Coulter's waist.

"I wish Elnora hadn't set her heart so on that shirrin'," she said to Marilla. "It's such slow work. If it was tucks, now, I could do it on the machine in no time. Ah!" She bent herself backward to rest her tired muscles. "This settin' up every night and every night ain't what it's cracked up to be. I wish you'd light the other lamp too, Marilla, whilst you're about it. I want all the light I can git on this fine stitchin'. You needn't do any more now. You done enough for one day. See what kind of a supper you can get up. And, Marilla, make the tea extry strong. I got to set up till this thing's done."

As she sat stitching away, the brilliant contrast of the black and white made her tired eyes burn as if for sleep. She passed her hand over them, and was just gathering up the goods anew upon her needle when the side door suddenly opened and Mrs. Coulter stepped in.

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"Why, Elnora Potter! How you scared me!" cried Almeda.

"I ain't got but a minute to stay. I must hurry right home. Mercy! Comin' up them steps o' yourn just about finishes me. I dropped in to see how you was gettin' along with my waist. Why, you ain't got it *near* done, have you?"

"O my, yes. They ain't much more. They's just this shirrin', an' some finishin' up to do around the bottom, and put the sleeves in, an' a few little things. I was held back a good deal by Mrs. Avery's suit. When do you start?"

"I *was* going on the 10.40, but if you——"

"Oh, well, now, don't you worry. I'll finish it if I live, and if I don't live—I'll come and tell you. I'll send it up to you by Marilla the first thing in the morning. Before nine o'clock, anyhow."

"Now, you'll be sure?"

"Oh, I'll set up till I git it done."

"I hate to think of you doin' that on my account. I could go on the afternoon train, but I told them to look for me— But we could telegraph 'em!"

"No, I wouldn't do that. If Molly was to see a telegram and get a sudden scare, you don't know what might happen. No, I'll set up and finish it. Why, they ain't hardly nothin' to do! I've set up many's the night before this, an' will, I guess, as long's I can see to thread a needle."

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"Well, all right, if you can. I'll run along now. Land! Don't it get dark quick now? Good night!"

After supper, Almeda set to work with all her might, once in a while dropping a word to Marilla, but for the most part silently attacking the task, which was greater than she had given Elnora Coulter to suppose.

"Well, I should say you *did* make the tea extry strong, Marilla. 'Twould take the bark off a white oak. . . . My! This black and white hurts my eyes like all get-out. . . . I guess I'll leave the shirrin' to the very last, and if it comes to the worst, I'll do it the first thing in the morning by daylight."

"Can't I help you, Miss Carey?" asked Marilla.

"No. You done enough for to-day. Why don't you go to bed? Settin' up this way! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, an' you dead for sleep."

"Up there in the dark all by myself?" whined the girl.

"O fudge! What is there to be afraid of?"

"Hark!" whispered Marilla.

"That's only Mumma's dog howlin'," sniffed Almeda, and returned to her work.

"They say it's a sign somebody's goin' to die when a dog howls that way."

"Well, I guess that's so. Somebody's dyin' every minute. You oughtn't to pay any attention to such foolishness."

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The girl made an inarticulate protest and curled herself on the lounge. Presently, overcome by fatigue and the late hours for the three nights previous, she fell asleep, and Miss Carey, looking up as she threaded her needle, forbore to waken her. It was some company to hear the tired girl's regular breathing.

As it grew late the footsteps of passers-by became rarer and rarer, and finally ceased. The sounds of daylight and human activity hushed, and in their stead came the sounds of the night and that activity which we fear is human, either in the flesh or out of it: the furtive snapping of the woodwork yielding to the pressure of an unseen foot; the creak of the shutter crying lonesomely; the squeaking of the leafless boughs chafing one another in the night wind that now wailed pitifully through a chink in the door, and now hushed as if hoping for an answer; that frightened scurry and shriek of the mice scrambling behind the plastering; the rattle of a bit of mortar falling down the chimney. The lights in the houses about disappeared. Here one vanished, there another, until at last the only radiance in all Minuca Center shone through the window of the house where one woman slept, and another thudded with the machine or whipped her hand out rhythmically with the sure movement of the deft seamstress, fending off momently the wolf that momently returned.

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Each hour the bell of the flax factory sounded more clearly as the watchman told the passing night. As the twelve strokes began, the seamstress paused.

"I don't believe but what I could get that shirring done to-night, after all," she said softly to herself, leaning back and looking at her work. Stepping noiselessly, she tiptoed out into the kitchen and got a tumbler from the cupboard, slipped the bolt of the side door, and went out to the well. She let the bucket down and, while it filled, stood looking at the night. It was strangely dark and still. No star shone. The sky hung low and sullen, and as her eyes relaxed themselves she could see a deeper black was stealing up the heights to mid-heaven from the west. A faint breath fanned her cheek a moment, and then died away. There seemed to be something in the hush that waited expectant. Far, far off yonder somewhere a dog howled a long and dreary howl. A cold chill went over her. "Somebody is walkin' over my grave," she said, and drew up the bucket of cold water, the chain clucking as it rolled up on the windlass, and the bucket swung on the stone curb.

"My! that's right out o' the northwest corner," she said, after she had drunk.

She shut the door, put the glass away, and tiptoed back to her work. Marilla moved uneasily from time to time and muttered in her sleep. At last Al-

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meda was on the last row of the shirring. The black and white stung her eyes, but it was almost done now. She would send Marilla up— The door opened suddenly. She looked up. There, with her hand on the doorknob, stood Elnora Coulter.

"Why, Elnora Coulter! What brings you——"

And even as she spoke there was no one, no one but herself and the sleeping Marilla. Was Elnora trying to scare her? She waited, but there was nothing. She hearkened. There was no sound of footsteps. There was nothing but the dog howling far off yonder somewhere. A chill crept over her, an awful fear of something. Mastering it, she rose, took the lamp in her hand, and went to the door. There was no one. The whole world seemed to be holding its breath, intently listening.

"Elnora!" she called.

There was no answer. She stepped out by the well and held the lamp over her head. She hearkened. She could hear the wick sucking up the oil. The hair of her head prickled.

"Elnora!" she called again.

But none answered. A sudden gust of wind puffed out the lamp she held. A blinding flash of lightning flickered through a scud of clouds flying athwart the sky, and the unseasonable thunder cracked above her head. The lamp fell from her hands and shivered into bits on the brick walk. The tall trees bowed

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themselves under the fierce gale, and with a shriek she fled into the house.

"Marilla!" she cried, and shook the girl roughly. "Marilla! Wake up!"

The apprentice moaned: "Don't let them bury me. Oh, don't, Miss Carey. . . . Oh, I'm so glad you waked me. I had such a terrible dream. I thought they were putting me into a grave, and it seemed like——"

"Marilla! Did you see her?"

"See who?"

"Elnora Potter."

"Elnora—Mrs. Coulter? Why, was she here? No, I didn't see her. Why, it's nearly one o'clock! What was she——"

"Listen to me. I was sewing on her waist, as wide awake as I am this minute, and the door opened and there she stood, and I says to her: 'Why, Elnora! What are you doing here at this time o' night?' and just as I spoke to her she was gone. I thought at first she was trying to play a joke on me, and I took the light outdoors, but there wasn't anybody there."

"O Miss Carey! It was a warning!" gasped Marilla, and clutched Almeda frantically. "Oh, I'm so afraid! I'm so afraid!"

"Hark! What's that?"

It was the first pattering downfall of the raindrops.

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The storm broke that had menaced all night. The whole world no longer held its breath and waited, expectant, eagerly listening. And now the furtive silence was filled with thronging noises. Mysterious footsteps tracked through the house; beckoning fingers tapped on the window and, as the startled women swiftly turned, as swiftly withdrew into the darkness; unseen watchers, spying on their terror, whispered and tittered. Clutching each other, rigid with fear, the two women sat till fatigue overpowered them, and the gray dawn struggling through the watery skies made them look livid as corpses tumbled in a heap in the dull yellow light of the dying lamp.

A rapping at the sitting-room door aroused them. Almeda answered the summons. There stood Silas Coulter.

"Elnora's dead," he said, and his chin quivered.

"O my Lord!" gasped Almeda, her knees shaking. "I knew it! I knew it!"

"Why, 'Meda, how could you? You're the first person I seen. I come right here, first thing."

"I seen her as plain as I see you right now. Come in, come in. I declare I'm just so upset I don't know what I'm about, keepin' you waitin' out in the rain. I'll take your umbrella."

"How do you mean you seen her?"

"It was a little before one o'clock." He made a

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movement. "I was settin' up sewin' on her waist that she was goin' to wear to Columbus to-day."

Mr. Coulter choked and moved his head slowly from side to side.

"No, poor girl! she won't never wear it any place, an' her heart was plumb set on it. Well, sir, the door opened and there she stood. Now, Silas, you know I never was one o' them that goes around tellin' such things, and I never believed one speck in 'em, but it's as true as I'm settin' here, an' I says to her, 'Why, Elnora, what are you doing up this time o' night?' No, I didn't, either. Now let me tell the truth about it. I was just goin' to say that, but I didn't get it all out, and she was gone. Tchk! tchk! tchk! Tell me about it. Did she suffer any?"

"I don't know, I don't know," he quavered. "Here lately, you know, she has been havin' them spells and was doctorin' fer 'em, but I didn't think they was nothin' specially dangerous. It didn't seem possible. I was awful tired last night when I went to bed, an' all I know is that I waked up 'long about twelve—I remember hearin' the bell over to the flax factory strike, an' I counted. She was up then, but I must 'a' fell asleep. 'Long toward five I waked up again, an' when I found she wasn't there I felt kind o' uneasy an' got up an' went to look for her. She was in the spare room, layin' on the floor. I called to her, but—but she"—something swelled in his

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throat as if to strangle him; he drew in a long, shaking breath—" but she didn't answer me. She'll never answer me ag'in. Oh! Oh! O my Lord! O my Lord! what shall I do? What shall I do without her? Thirty-seven years, Almedy — thirty-seven years." The sobs burst through his cramped throat like coughs. After a little he said: " Poor Molly! Poor Molly! I'm afraid to let her know. I'm afraid it'll kill her."

Almeda sat with her hands clinched together. The tears rising slowly in her under lids dripped down her withered cheeks and splashed one by one on her knuckles, white with the intensity of her grip.

" Ever since we was little girls we've been the closest friends. Silas, I hope you won't think it hard that she should come to tell me she was gone, but last week she said to me, ' Le's make it up that whichever one of us is called first shall come and tell the other.' She kept her word, Silas, she kept her word."

The waist lay where it was until after the funeral. Almeda could not bear to touch it, or any other work, until then. The story of the apparition of Elnora Coulter spread over the town, gathering the most marvelous additions as it went. Almeda sent for Brother Longfellow, the pastor of the Center Street M. E. Church, which she attended.

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"I want you should hear the straight of it just the way it was," she said to him, when he came, "with nothin' added to it, ner nothin' took away. It's no small thing to tell the truth; it's no small thing, Brother Longfellow; but as near as I can I'm goin' to do it. And, Marilla, if I make it the least bit different from what I told you that night, I want you should correct me. I was sewin' on Elnora Coulter's waist the night she died, she expectin' to wear it down to Columbus the next mornin'. It was close on to one o'clock and I was settin' by this work table. I had the big lamp on it, the one I dropped when the wind blowed it out when I was outside by the well.

"The door opened—there! jist like it's openin' now. They's somethin' wrong with the ketch, and it comes open itself. I don't lay no stress on the door openin', because a spirit could go right through 'em. Now, Marilla, you stand right there. That's where Elnora was when I looked up. I says to her— Wait a minute; I'll get the waist and show you exactly how I was."

As Almeda picked up the garment she said: "I was as broad awake as I am this minute. See? Here's the needle stickin' where I took the last stitch."

She stopped and was silent for a long time. The hand that held the waist dropped by her side. The other went up and clutched her chin, the knuckles

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resting on her lips. The preacher and the apprentice waited fixedly for her to resume. She came over and sank down into a chair.

"Marilla, you come here a minute," she said at length. "Do you see anything about them last few stitches?"

"Why, Miss Carey! The last four or five are all every which way."

"Do you, Brother Longfellow?"

"Why, yes, Sister Carey," he said, after he had adjusted his glasses. "They look uneven as compared with the others."

"Well, now, there it is," said the dressmaker. "That was the fourth night I had set up late and that black and white is very hard on the eyes. The last time I seen Elnora alive she come in without knockin' at that side door, and stood there where Marilla stood a while ago. . . . It must 'a' be'n the door blowed open. . . ."

Her voice dwindled into silence, the others staring as mazed as she—yes, as dismayed as she at the inevitable inference. For it was not the explication of Elnora Coulter's ghost alone they saw unfolded, but the explication of all questionable shapes that have been seen since time began; seen with the mind's eye from within outwardly, and not the other way around; when the soul lies tranced in the middle state between the sleeping and the waking.

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Marilla's disappointed superstition first awoke. She cried in pettish anger: "Then it wasn't a spook, at all? O fiddle!" Determined, though, to have it so in spite of everything, she argued: "But it must have been! It just *must* have been! How could you been a-dreamin' setting up there sewin'?"

The preacher hushed her with a gesture of his hand. "This is God's doings," he reproved her, "and no small matter. He would have us know the truth concerning them that sleep. How any one particular ghost came to be seen is less to be considered than how ghosts came to be believed in. Your experience, Sister Carey, your most wonderful experience, shows plainly how they came to be believed in."

He spoke of the coincidence of Mrs. Coulter's death, and how such instances, rare though they might be, were yet frequent enough to keep alive the ancient heathen doctrine that the dead are restless and unsettled. Deep within her heart Almeda Carey mused on things the preacher never dreamed of. It had torn her soul with anguish that, since it seemed that, after all, they could come back, the single visitant from Behind the Veil should be Elnora, and not that nearer one by far to her than ever Elnora was, her one and only lover in the days of youth when it is always sunny, her one and only lover, whose dear face through all these years still smiled upon her from beneath his jaunty soldier cap,

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whose curly locks still glistened in the light of that spring morning long ago. Even were the darling vision to vanish in a moment, why had it nót come?

"He giveth His beloved sleep," she heard the preacher say, "not weary wanderings to and fro." And on the instant disappeared forever all the haunting discontent, the queryings and questionings, and the calm peace of disillusionment reigned in their stead.

She rolled the garment up whose last four stitches held so much for her. In David's certitude she spoke the words that David spoke: "I shall go to him; but he cannot come to me."

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THE ELOPEMENT

I DECLARE, if it wasn't for the looks of it, I wouldn't go one step."

The man standing outside the day coach of the north-bound train said nothing. It did not seem necessary to him to say anything now. He had responded to that sentiment too many times before.

"But, of course, now that I got my ticket bought and everything," reasoned the woman leaning out of the car window as if to convince herself. "Cousin Jabez invitin' me so particular and all. And then I hain't be'n back to York State for thirty year. You was with me then. You mind how I took you along with me? I woosht you was goin' along now. I don't feel right about leavin' you all alone. It dooz seem so kind o' heartless."

"Oh, I'll get along all right," said the man calmly, and looked to one side.

"Well, you must write and tell me how everything is. I know I'll feel awful worried about you. You'll write now, every week."

"Yes, ma'am. Hullo, Johnny. How're you?"

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"Be sure and lock up everything when you go 'way from the house."

"Yes, ma'am. That's Johnny Mara."

"Is it? And do up your dirty clothes every week in a bundle and take 'em over to Longbrake's so's Miss Bennett kin git 'em when she comes for their wash. Laws! I feel awful worried about your socks; you jist go right through 'em and nobody to darn 'em for you. Well, you'll jist have to git new ones. I got the biggest notion not to go at all. If it wasn't for the looks of the thing, I'd back out right now. Don't forget to change the under sheet once a week. You know where the clean ones is, in the lower bureau drawer. And put the top sheet in under you and the clean one on top. Tchk! I'll bet the bed won't be made once the whole time I'm gone. I got a good notion not to— And mind, you water them plants. If it should turn real cold, you better come home once in a while and look after the fire and see how things is gittin' along. I wouldn't have them plants git froze, especially that pineapple geranium——"

"All aboard!" called out the conductor.

The man outside the car brightened up and cried, "Well, good-by, ma!"

"Good-by, Augustus," she answered, gripping the hand he gave her. "Write reg'ler. Put the milk bucket out every night on the back porch. The

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tickets is in the blue cup on the second shelf of the pantry cupboard, and when they give out you must remember and git more— Mercy!" The train gave a jerk as it started. She held on to her son's hand. "Well, good-by, Augustus. Don't track in any more mud'n you can help when it rains. I expect the place'll look like distraction. Pity sakes! I woosht I hadn't 'a' come. Well, good-by, Augustus."

The train was going so fast that Augustus was forced to let go. His mother shouted, "Oh, say! Wind the clock Saturdays—" But the car swept past the linseed-oil mill and she sank back in her seat, saddened by the consciousness that he had not heard her and now it was too late to tell him. She just knew there would be something she would forget at the very last minute. For half a cent she would get out at Mt. Victory and take the next train back. But when the brakeman opened the car door and first inquired and then answered his own question, "Ma-oun Vict'ry? Ma-oun Vict'ry," she sat still. She might as well go on now that her ticket was punched. It would look kind of green for her to get off after having gone so far, but still——

Augustus went back to the coal office at once depressed and elated, but a little more elated than depressed. He was lonesome, but he was also free. It was a new thing for him to do as he pleased, though he would be forty on his next birthday. All

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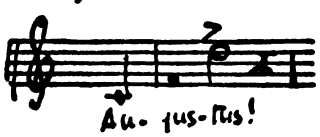
of us have had mothers; few of us had so much of a one as Augustus Biddle had. She took entire charge of him, his goings out and his comings in, his downsittings and his uprisings. All that the proverb about the hen with one chick hints at was exemplified in her treatment of the only surviving member of her family. She was too strong-minded to be his slave, but all that she did was for his temporal and eternal welfare. Realizing that letting him "piece" between meals, sit up till all hours, eat candy and cake and such trash were but species of the Higher Cruelty, she was yet among the first to revolt against the doctrine that sparing the rod meant spoiling the child. Nevertheless, she held that when a child was naughty it ought to be punished, and the way she did it was now part of the history of Logan County. It was a byword in Minuca Center, "Augustus! if you do that again, I'll stick you with a pin!" Yet it must have been that the pin was mightier than the rod, for the young ones that used to take doses of "peach-tree oil" and were slapped halfway across the kitchen when they were naughty, were always whining, "Aw, I don't want to," and, "Cain't I stay out a little longer?" while Mrs. Biddle had only to come out on the back porch and chant:

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And Augustus promptly answered, "Hoo!"

"Come!"

"Yes, ma'am," and dropping everything, the boy ran to see what his ma wanted.

It is always a surprise to parents to find that their children are growing big. They see them by interior vision as perpetually only about four years old. So when the perilous season of life comes, father and mother are taken unawares. But they think, anyhow, it is only the girls that need watching. Not so with Mrs. Biddle. She knew that it is a time when all the ordered universe of a boy's life melts and dissolves away and that in its fumes are pictured iridescent phantasmagoria of the strenuous life, battle and heroism and deeds of high emprise. Vague ambitions stir the heart. One does not know for certain whether he will dip his hands in Indian blood or be a detective, whether he will find a gold mine or brake on the railroad, but he will go far away, maybe clear to Galion, and be rich, and when he comes back people will say, "That's him!" It seems as if his beard would never come, and he gets red in the face when his father asks, "How did you cut your lip so, Eddie?" It still mortifies him almost to death to be made to sit with the girls in school, but, somehow, he begins to look at them with more interest, and if he is very bold, he may slip the fairest of them a note that reads: "Dear Gracie I thought I would

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write you a letter I love you so good-by from Eddie Johnson."

We think this is most amusing, but in our hearts we know that we are only trying to carry it off with a laugh, while inwardly we tremble for the children. We remember our own lives, and we fetch a sigh and say, "Ah, Lord! What they've got to go through with!" And yet what can we do? It is as if they were at the crisis of a deadly fever. It seems as if we can't sit still and wait; we must be doing for them. And yet what we do, though with the best intent, may be only murder of body and soul. The time is come when they are no longer ours; they are partly their own. With a girl, the problem is simpler, but the boy is like the fisherman in the Arabian tale that finds the leaden bottle in which is sealed up an Afreet. Very potent is the Afreet, very potent for good—let us hope, for good—but also very potent for evil, as we cannot forget. We would not have our sons miss finding the bottle, and yet who of us but has seen the day when the Afreet's cruel shape darkened the heaven over our heads and menaced our lives, when we wished we knew the magic word that could conjure the evil Djinn into the vase again, that we might hurl it far, far out to sea? And no such word exists.

The widow Biddle was not taken by surprise when her son's time of peril came. The leaden bottle was

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found, but never was unsealed. She knew that what Augustus needed was a mother's tender watch care. That watch care was not relaxed one moment in thirty years. She meant him to marry some day, but that day was like the moon that the little child wonders to see go about as it does. It was always off yonder. She looked about her and saw the foolish matches and the wrangling homes, and resolved that her boy should not throw himself away if she could help it. There was no need for hurry, because a man can always get married, no matter how old he is. She knew that while in theory it is the man that asks, in practice it is the woman that arranges conversation so that the man must say, "Will you marry me?" or else feel like a natural-born slink. She did not propose to have her Augustus crowded up in a corner that way. When she found the right kind of a girl she would do the arranging of the conversation; she would secure the propinquity that provokes love. She had not yet found the right girl; of late years she had not prosecuted the search with much diligence. It seemed to her that Augustus was just about as well off as he was. He had a comfortable home. She looked after him and took care of him, laid out his clean linen, and told him when to go and get his hair cut. There were no children whooping and howling around and tracking up the house. Augustus appeared to be satisfied. Probably a tiger

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brought up on the bottle, kept in a cage and fed on mush and milk, would never regret the absence of butcher's meat. But leave the door open——

Worried for fear he would not wind the clock, but otherwise calm in her mind, Mrs. Biddle went on a visit to her folks back in York State. If a man is not steady and settled down when he is going on forty years old, when will he be, I should like to know? So the tiger's cage door was left on the jar.

Alas for men! They need watching all the time, even when they are past forty. In a town like Minuca Center they generally get it, too. There is no lack of interest in other people in such a place. The Center hummed like a beehive when it saw Augustus Biddle taking the girls out buggy riding, some of the old maids, too, who the men folks were sure were fairly eating their hearts because they were not married and working hard every day and Sunday, too, for board and clothes. Along in the latter part of January, when Mrs. Biddle had been gone a month or so, it was generally agreed that the situation was critical and that something ought to be done about it.

"W'y, if his ma knowed the way he was a-actin'," vowed Sarepta Downey to Mrs. Lester Pettitt, "she'd jist about go up."

"Well, I don' know's I blame him much," de-

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clared Mrs. Pettitt. "Anybody that's be'n kep' under the way he has all his life. If I was a man, I'd fly 'round amongs' 'em, too, come a good chance."

"Oh, he ain't a-flyin' 'round amongs' 'em now no more," corrected Sarepta. "Huh-*uh*. Not now. He's got all through with that. I don't know where your eyes are at that you hadn't seen that. He's got her all picked out, bless your soul."

"Who?"

"W'y, Carrie Pollock!"

"Carrie Pollock? W'y, I thought Frank Woodmansee was goin' with her."

"Well, so he is and so's Augustus."

"If he gets her away from Frank Woodmansee he's a dandy," put in Mr. Pettitt, who laid down his paper to listen to the gossips. "Why, Frank Woodmansee'd tole a bird down out of a tree with his talk. Best man ever Blackwell had on a tin wagon. He could get more eggs and butter from the farmers' wives for less tinware than any man goin'. Blackwell kicked like a steer when Frank got too big feelin' to drive a wagon and wanted to come in and be in the store, but he just had to give in to him. Terrible ambitious, Frank is. And now Blackwell don't do nothin' but brag how smart Frank is. He jist about runs the whole concern. He's a little too daggon smart, I think. You mark now if he don't eucher Blackwell out o' everything and have

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it all to himself in about two years. Oh, he's bound to rise."

"Carrie'll do well to get him then," said his wife.

"Well, I don' know about that. Frank's terrible selfish, and outside o' business they ain't a great deal to Frank. He's the best one of the whole tribe. The rest is jest common on'ry."

"Carrie thinks a lot of Augustus," said Miss Downey. "He's real well educated, Augustus is, and knows a lot o' poetry. He's good to his ma and handy around the house, always doin' something to help the women folks. Oh, Frank'll have to git his feet in under him if he's goin' to keep her. Augustus is rushin' her for all he's worth. Hadn't 'a' be'n for him, Carrie and her ma wouldn't ever 'a' went no place. Frank wouldn't never think of it, but now since Augustus got to comin' around w'y Carrie and her ma has be'n to more places than they ever was in their born days before. Reg'lar foot race it is; whichever one o' them gits there first the other one takes her ma some place."

"So's to keep in with Carrie," suggested Mrs. Pettitt.

"Well, I don' know," answered Sarepta. "Look like to me, Frank, he'd like to git Carrie, she's so pretty, and he'd like to git her ma, she got such a good head for business. Why, law me! if it hadn't 'a' be'n for her, Jim Pollock wouldn't amounted to

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*any*thing, and after he died she got more out o' the farm on sheers'n he ever did workin' it himself, and here they're livin' in town and havin' everything nice. Yes, sir, Frank wants her, too, and "—Sarepta leaned over and laughed against the back of her hand—" look like to me that since Augustus started in to cut out Frank with Carrie, he thought he might as well make a good job of it and cut him out with her ma, too."

" Tchk! The land!" ejaculated Mrs. Pettitt.

" Carrie's a right pretty girl," mused Mr. Pettitt. " I be'n havin' my eye on Carrie this good while now." He looked at his wife out of the corner of his eye. She was very busy with an apron of Janey's she was hemming. She was painfully jealous-hearted, and Lester Pettitt loved to tease. " But if I was to be left a widower right sudden, I don't know but I'd kind o' shine up to Ma Pollock."

" O you!" burst out Mrs. Pettitt, unable to restrain herself.

" Yes," pursued Mr. Pettitt, " she'd suit me 'bout as well as any of 'em. Good lookin', too, she is. Women like Caroline Boyce don't no more'n git good and ripe till they're along about forty. Now, ma, here, when she's forty, you know what she'll look like? Why, a two weeks' washin' done up in a bedspread." He winked at Sarepta, who knew that if there was one thing that Mrs. Pettitt dreaded

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worse than death itself it was fat. She was just a plump little body now, but her sister Polly Ann was considered "a sight!" She weighed three hundred pounds, and always used to hop over the hot-air registers in the aisle of Center Street church. She was afraid to step on them lest she break through.

"Caroline Pollock's more'n forty," said Mrs. Pettitt, with much asperity. "Look at that big, grown-up daughter."

"Oh, no, she ain't," corrected Sarepta. "She married Jim Pollock when she wasn't but eighteen, and Carrie's only nineteen now. She ain't a day over thirty-nine. She's jist about Augustus Biddle's age."

"Gus ort to let Frank have the girl and him go for her ma," said Mr. Pettitt. "Man like him, raised by hand, as you might say, ud never git along with a young girl. You know what Caroline Pollock is, but Carrie, law! she don' know what she is herself. Man marry her, he's got to take her sight unseen and trust to luck. My! my! How many of 'em gits fooled. Now, me, f'r instance— But what's the use?" Mr. Pettitt sighed and sadly shook his head.

Mrs. Pettitt speared him with a look, but he pretended not to notice. Sarepta saw that it was time to make a diversion.

"My land!" said she, "if Augustus Biddle should marry Caroline Pollock, his ma would just naturally paw up the ground! W'y, them two ud no more git

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along together than I don' know what. Mercy! What a time they'd have. I sh'd think somebuddy'd up and let that pore woman away off yan in York State know what kind o' doin's they was goin' on around here. Wouldn't she come home jist a-flukin'? My! Well, I must be gittin' along. Here 'tis 'most bedtime and me settin' here runnin' on about my neighbors as if I didn't have anything better to do. Well, good night, all. When you comin' over, Mis' Pettitt? You hain't come to see me in a long time. You, too, Mr. Pettitt. Oh, I can see; you needn't bring the light. Snow's goin' awful fast, ain't it? Well, good night."

The door had no more than shut on her when Mrs. Pettitt exploded with pent-up fury. "WHAT did you go and talk like that for before that woman when you know—when you kno-o-o-ow that she runs and tells everything that she hears?"

Mr. Pettitt threw up one arm as if to shield his head and cried in mock terror, "Help! help! help!"

She was determined not to let him see her smile. "Oh, it's nothing to laugh at. I declare! you're more of a child than Janey is right now. I don't know what possessed you to say such a thing before her."

"Say what?" inquired the innocent Mr. Pettitt.

"Oh, you know very well. That about you gittin' fooled in me, for one thing."

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"Well, didn't I? Didn't you promise the preacher you'd obey me? Well, do you? No, you don't. Didn't I command you last night to sew that button on my vest? Yes, I did. Is it sewed on? No, it hain't. *You* don't care if I go round town lookin' like a scarecrow and people pointin' the finger o' scorn at me. I'll bet my second wife won't——"

"Oh, hush up and gimme that vest. I forgot all about it as slick as a whistle. I'll sew it on now while I think of it. Well, land of love! Did you ever hear the beat o' them two fellows tryin' to cut each other out with two women at once? The idy!"

"What I want to know is what Ma Biddle'll do with Augustus. He's gittin' 'most too big now to be stuck with a pin."

"I hope she won't come home till he gets married."

"Oh, somebody'll write to her before."

"Who?"

"Who? W'y, anybody. I know fifty that ud ask for nothin' better. I wouldn't put it past *you*, for one."

"ME? Me tell her? W'y, Lester Pettitt, you're the meanest white man that ever lived! W'y, I'd no more think o' doin' such a thing— Go on away from me. Go on, I tell you. I'm mad now. The idy of sayin'— Go way, now-ah. Come a huggin' and kissin' around me after sayin'—Lester-rah! If you do

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that again, now—I'll—I'll stick you with a pin. Sh! You'll wake up Janey."

Somebody did write and tell Mrs. Biddle, and it wasn't Augustus, either. It just goes to show how if you escape Scylla you fall into Charybdis. Be too lax with children, and they run wild and terrify the neighborhood; be too strict with them and they become expert dissimulators, preserving the form of truth, but denying the power thereof. So it was that Augustus's letters, while professing to give all the news of the Center, omitted that which would have been even more interesting to her than it was to her neighbors. Who it was that sent the postal card on which was written: "When the cat's away, the mice will play," is not certainly known, for it was not signed. When it got to Mrs. Biddle it had much the same effect upon her as the appearance of the fingers of a man's hand that came out of the wall and wrote upon the plaster had upon the revelers at Belshazzar's feast. It put a stop to all her enjoyment. She worried and worried about what it could mean. Then came a letter signed which gave her the interpretation. Her kingdom was about to be divided and given to another. She packed her trunk after she answered the letter.

It may be regarded as significant that Frank Woodmansee should have met her at the train. They had a long conference together. "Wootsy" Morton,

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the depot operator, saw them talking and called up Augustus on the telephone.

"Say, Biddle!" he said, his hand making a tube over the transmitter, "is that you, Biddle? This is Morton at the depot. Say, your ma came in on No. 4. Why didn't you— Yes, on No. 4. Why, Frank Woodmansee met her. Him and her is holdin' a confab on the platform now. Didn't you know she was comin' ho— Hello! Are you there yet? Hello, Central! What did you cut us off for? You did, too. Huh? Well, he don't answer. Say; ring 'em up again."

Bzzzzzinngt!

"Hello, Biddle!"

"Don't answer," said Central in her prim, flat, far-away voice.

The hand 'phone in Augustus's office swung violently on its double cord as Augustus slammed the door shut and locked it, after taking a paper from a desk drawer and thrusting it into his pocket. His horse and buggy were in the shed, and he drove up Columbus Street, looking behind him fearfully.

"She'll most likely walk over," he said to himself, "specially if she's got somebody to carry her grip-sack. She'll go to the office first and then she'll go to the house, and if I ain't there, w'y, then her and Woodmansee'll go on up to— 'Tain't quite as much time as I'd like to have, but still— I laid out to

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go easy about it and not plunge in headlong this way."

He jumped out at the Pollocks' house, hurriedly tied his horse, and went around by the side door, at which he knocked. Mrs. Pollock answered the summons.

"Where's Carrie?" he gasped and pushed his way in. He felt a kind of goneness in his insides.

"W'y, she's— I don't know where she is, Mr. Biddle. Some girl come along a while ago and pirted for her and she put on her things and went out. I guess she won't be gone long."

"How long?"

"W'y, I don't really know; half an hour, mebby, or mebby an hour."

Augustus sank down into a chair apathetically, his hands drooping between his knees, and his head bent forward. He had not counted on her being from home.

"Don't you think you could find her?" he asked, after a while.

"W'y, I don't know as I could." Then as she noted the expression in his face, Mrs. Pollock cried out, "Augustus Biddle! What *is* the matter? You look like you'd lost every friend on earth."

"Ma's come home," he said, and licked his lips. "She didn't send me no word she was comin'. 'Wootsy' Morton telephoned me he seen her and

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Frank Woodmansee holdin' a confab on the depot platform. I'll jist bet you anything—" He got up and walked the floor. "If he has now—if he has, I'll break his neck, I will, by Godfrey!"

"W'y, Mr. Biddle!"

"I don't care. Tattlin' on me. Consarn his picture!"

"You ain't saw your ma yet?"

"No, I hain't." He paused. "I don't know as I jist exactly wanted to see her till—till afterwards. You don't know where Carrie is?"

"W'y, no, I don't. She started out— What did you want to see her about?"

"Why-ah," said Augustus, turning his hat in his hands, "I kind o' thought mebby she'd like to take a ride over to Sunbury with me."

"To Sunbury? And your mother jist come back home?"

Augustus nodded as he looked into her face with a sort of pitiful smile and a doglike wistfulness. It was as much as to say, "Don't you understand why?" Mrs. Pollock stooped to pick a raveling off the floor and rose up red in the face. "I was over to Sunbury Friday and stepped into the county clerk's office—" He broke off suddenly and his mouth hung open as if he had just thought of something. "Would you be willin'"—he said, gulped, flushed, and went on—"would you be willin' to go

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for a little ride with me summers out of the way till I got kind o' cammed down? Ma comin' home this away kind o' upset me. I woosht you would now."

"W'y—ah—" The widow hesitated.

"I woosht you would now," he persisted. "I'd—ah—I'd like to talk to you about somepin."

"Wy—ah, I expect mebby I could," said the widow slowly. "If you didn't go too far."

To Augustus, who looked every minute to see Vengeance coming around the corner of the house, it seemed an age before Mrs. Pollock got herself ready for the drive, but, terrified as he was, he could not help but recognize the fact that she had put in the time well. She was a fine-looking woman and no mistake, but Augustus could not tarry to admire, so anxious was he to flee from the wrath to come. The neighbors noticed when he drove away that he kept looking around all the time. Minnie De Wees said to her mother, "I jist bet you they's somepin up. Now, you mark; they's a hen on, sure as shootin'." Afterwards she bragged no little of her gift of prophecy.

Mrs. Biddle and Frank Woodmansee stopped at the coal office. It was locked up. They knocked on the door. There was no answer. Mrs. Biddle went to the window and shaded it with her hand so as to see in. The objects within looked familiar to her,

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even the paperweight carved out of a piece of cannel coal. They made her homesick for the sight of her son. But the hand 'phone dangling on its cord and the books left lying open, fretted her; it looked so slack and careless. She wanted to get in and straighten things up. He used to be so particular, but now, since that woman had got after him, he was letting everything go.

"Well, he ain't h-yur," said Frank Woodmansee. He noticed people stopping to look at him carrying Mrs. Biddle's gripsack and smiling so knowing. He told himself again that everything was fair in love and war, but he wasn't so sure of it as he had been.

"No, he ain't h-yur," assented Mrs. Biddle, with a sigh. "I reckon we'd better go on around to the house, and if he ain't there I can leave the gripsack with Mis' Longbrake—I expect you're kind o' tired luggin' it around—and then we'll go up and see—that woman." There was a cluck in her voice as she spoke the last words.

But the Biddle house was as deserted as the Biddle coal office. When the widow realized with a cold sickness at her heart that she was locked out of her own house, she sighed and went next door. Mrs. Longbrake had been watching her and came to meet her with, "W'y, I declare if it ain't Mis' Biddle! My! how well you're lookin'! It done you lots o' good to

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go away fer a spell. Come in, won't you, and set a while."

"No, thank you. I got to go right on. I'd like to leave my gripsack here, if you don't mind."

"W'y, certainly. Clarence, take Mis' Biddle's gripsack and set it over there by the bureau. Take your han'kerchief, Clarence. How many times have I got to speak to you about snufflin' that way? I s'pose you come fer the weddin', Mis' Biddle."

"What weddin'?" snapped Mrs. Biddle.

"W'y, Augustus and Carrie Pollock. I says to Mr. Longbrake when he come home and told me about it, 'It's funny,' I says, 'that——'"

"Is he married?" demanded Mrs. Biddle of Mrs. Longbrake and of Frank Woodmansee, turning first to one and then the other.

"I says to Mr. Longbrake, 'W'y, what does he want to git married over to Sunbury fer?' I says. 'Well,' he says, 'that's whur he got the license out,' he says."

"It ain't so!" cried Frank Woodmansee. "It ain't so! Carrie Pollock?"

"Carrie Pollock," asserted Mrs. Longbrake, bowing her head, closing her eyes, and primming her lips. "Nineteen years old. That's what the license said. Mr. Longbrake seen it when he was over to Sunbury, and Mr. Curl, the county clerk of Union County, he ast him if he knowed them parties, and

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Mr. Longbrake he said he did, and—" The sentence dwindled into nothing, for, with one look of mutual rage, Mrs. Biddle and Frank Woodmansee turned and hurried down the front walk. They would go up to Carrie Pollock's and have this thing straightened out.

" I reckon he feels right bad to git the mitten that way," said Mrs. Longbrake, as she watched them go up the street. " It kind o' s'prised him, 'pears like. I don't reckon Mis' Biddle likes it any too well, either, looks o' things. Clarence, I declare I don' know what I'll do to you if you behave that way before people again. I was mortified to death at you."

Frank Woodmansee rang the Pollock doorbell and rang and rang. They seemed fated to be shut out on all sides. All the neighboring windows that gave on the Pollock house concealed each an anxious watcher. Minnie De Wees, who lived in the third house, and could not see very well from there, actually went out on the front porch to look, but her boldness was condemned by all. They said that was a little too much. Mrs. Biddle and Frank Woodmansee talked very earnestly together in low tones, and Minnie De Wees nearly went out of her mind because she could not hear them. They gave one more ring and stood waiting. Then they heard the gate latch click; turning around, they beheld Carrie

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Pollock entering the yard. Woodmansee gave her a searching look.

"Why, how do you do, Mrs. Biddle?" said the girl, and then turned demurely to greet the man. "How do you do, Mr. Woodmansee? I thought you were in New York State, Mrs. Biddle. Aren't you home rather unexpected?"

Mrs. Biddle glared at the girl. "What have you done with my son?" she demanded. "Ain't you asha-a-med of yourself to stand there talkin' to me in that way after the way you've be'n a-actin'? And you dare"—she gulped—"you dare to look me in the face, you—you— Oh, for half a cent, I'd— Where's your mother? To take advantage of my absence in such a way when you knowed I was away from home and couldn't take care of him. It's a pity, it's a pity I couldn't leave home a minute to go and visit the only relations I got an' some of 'em I hadn't saw for thirty years, but you must go and— Where's your mother? Can't you talk?"

(You ought to hear Minnie De Wees get that off. She can do it to perfection.)

Carrie Pollock looked at the mother in amazement.

"Why, what's the matter?" she gasped.

"They're tellin' it around that you're goin' to marry Augustus Biddle," said Frank Woodmansee.

"Who's tellin' it around?" demanded Carrie.

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"I'd thank people to mind their own business and not go 'round with a whole pack o' lies about other folks. It ain't so. Now!"

"I s'pose you don't know nothin' at all about his gittin' a marriage license over to Sunbury to marry you," sneered Mrs. Biddle. "I s'pose you didn't hear nothin' at all about that."

"No, I didn't; not till you jist now told me I didn't hear one word about it." Frank Woodmansee looked as if a great load had been taken off his mind. Mrs. Biddle was still suspicious.

"I s'pose you want me to think Augustus went and got that license and you givin' him no encouragements whatever."

"Who, him?" Miss Pollock bridled angrily. "I don't care what you think. I guess I don't go 'round tellin' folks I'm a-goin' to marry 'em before they ask me to. I wish't you'd go on away from here. Mr. Woodmansee, won't you make her go 'way? I don't know anything about your old Augustus! Ma! Where's ma? Botherin' the life and soul out o' me with her old Augustus! The idea! Ma!" And Miss Pollock burst into a fit of crying and begged to be taken into the house; she never was treated so in her life; the key to the side door was under the kitchen step, if ma was out; she couldn't help it if Augustus Biddle took out forty marriage licenses; regular old Molly he was, anyhow; she wouldn't

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have him if he was the last man on earth. She wished she had never laid eyes on him.

Mrs. Biddle walked out of the front gate, but turned to see the tearful Miss Pollock being supported on Mr. Woodmansee's arm and led into the house, comforted by him in words that she could not hear, but whose substantial import she could imagine as well as the rest of the neighborhood. It gave her pride a rude shock to hear her son characterized as a "regular old Molly," and indignantly rejected as a possible husband by a snip of a girl that wasn't fit to black his shoes for him. He was too good for her, so he was, if she only knew it. She'd tell her so too the next time she saw her. The very idea!

Mrs. Biddle went back to her own house and got little Clarence Longbrake to come over and crawl through the cellar window and open the back door for her. This was her homecoming; this her welcome. She went through into the parlor and opened the shutters. The plants she had prized so highly stood yellow and rigid. She plucked a leaf and it crackled in her grasp. Papers were scattered all about. The bottom of the stove seemed bursting with ashes which had spilled out on the carpet. The bureau drawers were half pulled out, and from them poured a cascade of soiled collars and rumpled shirts. All the lessons of neatness which she had

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taught him for years were forgotten the minute her back was turned. No; she would not do him that injustice. He would have been all right if he hadn't been led away. But that the tender watch care of a mother all these years should have been as a dream of the night as soon as a silly girl with a doll's face looked at him— Oh, that was hard, that was hard to bear! This was her homecoming; this her welcome. She sank into a chair and crumbled the dry leaf in her fingers. Her eyes burned. She wondered at it a moment, for she was a woman not used to weep. All of a sudden, she caught an inward, quivering breath and the tempest of her grief and loneliness burst forth. Like Jeremiah amid the ruins of Jerusalem, she wept as she mused on the former things.

But when the storm had overpast, she roused herself and set about straightening up the house. She went out to the grocer's and the butcher's and got materials for supper. She expected Augustus home by then. The potatoes and the coffee she set on the back of the stove to keep warm for him. She would not fry the steak until he got home. As it grew later and later she went oftener to the door to listen for him. Once she was sure she heard him open the front gate, but it was only her imagination. At last she cooked the meat herself and sat down alone to eat what she could.

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As it came on to nine o'clock, his bedtime ever since he was twelve years old, she remembered that his bed had probably not been made for the day. One glance showed her that it had not been made or the linen changed since she had left, and she had been so particular to tell him about it. Something saddened her as she stripped off the sheets, wrinkled and twisted into ropes. For thirty years he had not slept away from home, not since the time he had gone with her to York State on a visit. How many times had she heard him say his prayer at that bed and had called out to him from the sitting room:

"Good night! Sleep tight!"

She turned the covers back all ready for him and sat down to wait. It was very late for him. The town clock struck ten. She went into the sitting room and wound and set the old clock on the shelf. Overcome by an impulse she could not restrain, she went out on the back porch and, looking into the blackness of the night, called out as of old time:

But only an echo came back to her. Slowly she turned and went inside.

* * * * * * *

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"The preacher didn't appear to notice where you changed that one into a three, did he, Augustus?"

"No," said Augustus.

"At any rate, he didn't say anything about it, huh?"

"No," said Augustus.

"But, laws! I won't be thirty-nine till November. I was jist about Carrie's age now when she was born."

"That so?"

"Uh-huh. How old are you, Augustus?"

"Who? Me? I'll be forty the last of September."

They sat before the grate fire in the bridal chamber of the Eagle Hotel in Sunbury after a supper at which the landlord had surpassed himself. There were four kinds of cake and eight kinds of preserves on the table, not "boughten stuff," either. The landlord's wife had put up all the preserves herself, they had so much fruit on the lot.

"What makes you so still, Augustus?"

"Oh, I don't know."

A long pause.

"You ain't sorry, are you?"

"Huh?"

"I say, you ain't sorry, are you?"

"W'y, no. Oh, no, no."

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Another long pause.

"W'y, what made you think I was sorry?"

"Oh, nothing, only you was so kind o' still. You right sure you ain't, now?"

"W'y, of course not."

Augustus sat looking at the soft-coal fire from which now and then a cinder fell. The woman rocked in the rocking chair slowlier and slowlier. She stopped. Then she spoke as one determined to settle the matter once and forever.

"Because if you are," she said, "you've only got your own self to blame, for it won't be my fault if you don't have a happy home. Mr. Pollock, he says to me, 'Carrie,' he says—them was pretty near the last words he said to me, that is sensible, for toward the last he was kind o' flighty and light-headed—'Carrie,' he says to me, 'you've be'n a faithful, true, and lovin' wife to me, you have,' he says. And so I was, and so I'll be to you, Augustus. For I could have got married many's the time before this, as I told you this afternoon when we was goin' apast Mumma's place, but seem like I didn't want to while Carrie was little, but now that she's growed up and likely to git Frank Woodmansee now any day, I don't deny but what I was lookin' around some, and I don't care; I don't think 'twas no more'n right that I should, me not bein' thirty-nine till next November, and jist in the prime of life, as you might

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say, and what ud I do if Carrie was to git married and me all alone in that great big house? And I always did like you, Augustus. Seem like you had such nice ways about you and understood a woman so well. Mr. Pollock, he was real good to me, that is, as good as he knowed how, but he was a kind o' roughlike sometimes. And then ag'in you ain't like some o' these men that's raised careful. They're apt to be dilicate and Nancified, as I told Carrie. And I knowed all the time that Carrie was jist plumb distracted about Frank Woodmansee, only he was kind o' half after me for a while there, and she only took up with you to make him jealous. Now, that's jist the pine-blank facts I'm a-tellin' you. You mind I told you that when we first started out this afternoon so's to kind o' git away from your ma till you got things straightened out like. And I told you then jist like I tell you now that Carrie's a nice enough girl, for all she's my daughter, and I wouldn't say a word ag'in her for the world, but she ain't no kind of a girl to marry a man that's be'n brought up for so long by a woman that's as good a housekeeper as your mother is, because I *know* she's a good housekeeper, for everybody says so, and as near as I can find out, she does jist exactly as I do in everything, except I always cook a little carrots with my peas. They taste so much better that way. But I kin cook 'em the other way. Now, your

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ma's punkin' pie is jist mine to a T, because I tasted hern at a social at Center Street one time. And you said you got the notion you wanted to git married, and now was your only chance while your ma was away, and if you'd 'a' sispicioned she was a-goin' to come back to-day you'd 'a' spoke to Carrie before, and you thought if you got the marriage license it ud kind o' bluff her into takin' you, but it wouldn't, because I know that girl too well, and still you didn't want to git it in Minuça Center, because if she didn't *have* you after all how flat you'd feel and all like that and what should you do, now that you had paid a dollar for the license, and it seemed like a waste o' money not to make some use of it, and you ast me yourself—now, didn't you?—if I wouldn't marry you, and I said you could change that one into a three so's nobody'd ever notice it, and it would be all right, for my name is Carrie Pollock as well as Carrie's is, and you put your arm around me and hugged me and kissed me. Now, ain't that so?"

"Yes, that's so," said Augustus.

"Well," she said, and began rocking again. She seemed a little inclined to cry, but she stopped when she heard the big clock downstairs in the empty dining room strike slowly and hoarsely.

"Ten o'clock," she said. "My! it's late, ain't it?"

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Augustus sat silent for a minute, and then he cried out: "Hoo!"

"I didn't say nothin'," she said.

"Oh . . . oh, . . ." Augustus seemed like one waking from a dream. "I thought I heard ma callin' me. Ho-hum! I'm sleepy, ain't you?"

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THE FICTIONAL MIND

"THERE is no such thing as realism in fiction," declared Lippincott, even more dogmatically than if he thoroughly believed what he was saying. "It is a contradiction in terms. It is the marvelous that interests, and no man can tell a marvelous tale and tell the truth. The people won't have a true story. They want the mirror held up to Nature, yes, but at such an angle that the sedate old dame appears another *Nini Pattes-en-l'air*. The fictional mind is at enmity against reason, for it is not subject to the law of reason, neither indeed can be."

Scrimgeour sat still, making lines on the tablecloth with his fork. He was not cynical, for he was but three-and-twenty, and nothing ailed him. The red in his cheeks clustered about a white spot just over his newly cut wisdom teeth. That white spot is the sigillum wherewith Nature certifies the bachelor's degree of Golden Optimism. Lippincott, on the other hand, was entitled to be a destructive critic of the universe, for he had reached the mature age of thirty-five, and in that gray November light one

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sees, if ever, the things of life in their true values. Having no more of his own to dissect, he was ruthlessly ripping open Scrimgeour's dolls and scattering their sawdust all about.

Scrimgeour thought on — or thought he was thinking—and presently came out with: "Truth is stranger than fiction." He said this with the air of a man that has driven at least one hen into the coop.

"It is seldomer met with," admitted Lippincott, with that superior smile that made his friends often wish to wring his neck, and proceeded: "But the saying itself is an illustration of the workings of the fictional mind. That was what made Tertullian say, '*Credo quia impossibile est.*' It uses the paradox as astronomers use the parallax."

"For instance—" prompted Scrimgeour.

"For instance, the case of Judge Blymire. He was a prominent lawyer of Palmyra, and had been county judge of Tadmor County. He had a son. We were boys together. The first Mrs. Blymire, a delicate, romantic woman, lived long enough to give the baby a name out of the last novel she had read. She called him Percy. The Palmyra boys democratized that to 'Skinner.' 'Skinner' Blymire," mused Lippincott, dreamily letting his eyes relax their focus, and in that blur, as in the magician's drop of ink, he saw again the picture of the dusty streets

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of an Ohio town, and the foolish, happy, barefooted boys playing there, as if the years had never passed. With a sigh, he recalled himself and went on:

"The judge married again when Percy was four years old. A stepmother for the boy. I can see your fictional mind prepare itself for a tale of petty persecutions and small cruelties. Since the days of Cinderella this is what is expected of stepmothers, and yet I never knew of one that was not scrupulously just. Mrs. Blymire was fairer to Percy than his own father. He used to give the boy the most terrific beatings for the least failings, and was perpetually checking him with, 'Don't do this,' and 'Let that alone.' He was a precise man, and his love for his son expressed itself in the effort to make the lad a perfect specimen of grave deportment. Percy idolized his stepmother. He loved her drolling and her keen sense of humor, but his father— It is pretty hard when a son hates his father.

"There is an old saying: 'If you have the name, you might as well have the game,' and when Skinner found that his father was bound to believe nothing but bad of him he apparently did what he could to justify the belief. And yet I know now that there was no evil in the boy, only mischief. He began to run with a wild crowd of quacking-voiced young fellows, and sometimes they were out till as late

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as ten and eleven o'clock at night. One Saturday evening, he and four or five other hobble-de-hoys that had been swimming at the Copperas Banks, below town, came through the deadly still streets of Palmyra, cutting up and singing after the fashion of their kind. It is exasperating, I grant you, but it is not the greatest sin. Bill McPherson, the police force of the town, checked them in his bossy, important way. They sauced him, and he arrested Charley Payne. Took him by the collar and tore it off. The boy struck at him in anger. Then Bill clubbed him, and Skinner and the rest interfered. He declared them all under arrest, and those that didn't get away he charged with rioting, disorderly conduct, resisting an officer—pretty nearly every misdemeanor on the books, I think.

"Word was sent to the parents, and they came and bailed out their sons. All except Judge Blymire. He let Percy stay in jail. Depend upon it, before the last bell rang for church next morning, the whole town knew all about it, and how the judge had said to Mrs. Blymire: 'If he'd been home at nine o'clock, like I told him to, this wouldn't have happened. I hope it will be a lesson to him.'

"We all looked at the Blymire pew, but only the judge and his wife stood up at the 'Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places.' We hoped that something would move the old man,

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but he stiffened himself with anything but 'an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart.' He knew that the people were looking at him and whispering, but he was sure that he was doing the right thing for his son's temporal and eternal welfare. I watched Alice Prouty, for she and Percy were boy-and-girl sweethearts as all Palmyra knew. It was plain that she had been crying.

"I remember going past and looking at the unresponsive jail windows that hot Sunday afternoon and wondering what was happening to Skinner. As I lingered, Bill McPherson came along, dragging a drunken woman he had arrested over across the tracks. She had been fighting, and she was screaming out such words as made all the windows of the houses near the jail come down in a hurry, stifling though the day was. After she was locked up, I could hear her yelling, the bare walls of the calaboose making her voice sound hollow, as if some one were speaking in a cistern.

"I have often pictured the boy lying on the bare board in his dark cell, weeping himself to sleep that Saturday night, rousing at intervals to weep again at the thought that he alone of all his companions was left to endure its shame. I can fancy him waking at the first blush of day, sore on his hips and shoulders from his hard bed, alive again to his misery which merciful sleep had removed far from

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him for a few hours. The jailer gives him his half loaf of sour bakers' bread and the long tin cup of water. Then he sits and waits. He hears the church bells ringing, and he knows that the other boys are out on the streets talking—about him—and his throat swells again and his eyes smart with the salt tears. Then comes stillness, broken only by the buzzing of the bluebottles against the high-up, immovable windows. He watches the streaks of sunlight slide slowly along the wall; he reads what predecessors have written on the plaster, and his soul gags at it. Is he such as that? The loneliness is unbearable, and then comes this yelling woman—he thought it was his father relented at last—and, as he hears her cursing for hours together, how gladly would he have back that loneliness!

"When I think of all this, I cannot see how Judge Blymire could have let his son stay there one hour. Yet he thought it was for the boy's good. He suffered, too, but it was as the Roman father suffered. Never was there a juster judge on the Tadmor County bench. It was Mrs. Blymire that saved Percy from working out his fine on the stone pile. When she saw that persuasion would not soften that hard old heart, she 'put her foot down,' and the judge went to the mayor's court Monday morning and brought Percy back with him.

"'Take off your coat, sir,' he said sternly.

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"'What are you going to do, father?' asked Mrs. Blymire.

"'I'm going to give this young man the soundest whipping he ever had,' he answered.

"'No. He has been punished enough. If you beat him, you must beat me, too.' And the judge, as he looked into her eyes, saw that he was a conquered man.

"From that day Percy treated his father with a cold deference that was more insolent than words. There was a lot of the Blymire in him, too. His mother hoped for the best and tried to smooth things over, but one morning something went wrong in court, and the judge came home to his midday dinner cross. Percy declined some dish, and the judge snarled at him: 'I suppose it ain't good enough for my gentleman. He's more used to bread and water.'

"'The right kind of a father wouldn't have left his son to taste the bread and water,' impudently declared Percy.

"'Don't you answer back to me, you young jail-bird. Are you going to eat that?'

"'No.'

"'Then get away from my table. If you don't like what's set before you, provide for yourself.'

"'Father, you don't mean that,' protested Mrs. Blymire.

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"'I do. Every word of it.' But he knew in his heart that he was more in anger than in earnest.

"Percy flung out of the room, ran upstairs, and a few minutes later, as they sat in silence, they heard the front door slam. The father ate stolidly, pretending not to hear. When he had gone, Mrs. Blymire found on her dressing table a penciled note from Percy, bidding her good-by, thanking her for her kindness to him, but wishing never to see his father again in life. That wish came true. They never looked into each other's face after that day, for one's eyes had closed in death when the other bent over him.

"Poor Alice! She and Mrs. Blymire mingled their tears as she told how Percy had said to her he was going away; he didn't say where, but she was never to forget him.

"The judge refused to believe that the boy had run away for good. He expected to smile triumphantly at the ragged, frowzy wanderer creeping back after dusk and humbly tapping at the kitchen door. It hurt him more, though, than he could own, even to himself, that his son should leave him so, and often his heart stopped to hearken to the cracking of the woodwork in the far-along stillness of the night, but it was only a tired beam stretching itself, and not the knuckle of the returning prodigal. When it was too late, he obeyed Mrs. Blymire's ad-

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vice to employ detectives, but no word ever came from the wandering boy, not even a line to his mother. I don't see why she should have been made to suffer for another's fault, but then women have been doing that since Time began.

"The chill nights lengthened into the frozen nights, and their house was still left unto them desolate. In my memory there is a silhouette of the judge standing at his library window, blue against the orange light of the soft-coal fire. Overhead, the moon shone fitfully through the clouds, torn by the bleak wind that made the big pines in the Blymire dooryard moan and whisper to themselves. He peered out as if watching for a slim young figure that never darkened the snows.

"Neighbors noticed that there was always a light in the kitchen of nights, and once Abby Lumbart, who had been help at the judge's ever since Percy was born, let it out accidentally that she had to set out a 'cold piece' every night. She was so embarrassed and made such haste to explain that it was for the judge, who had a way of waking up hungry along about two or three o'clock in the morning, that the neighbors pounced down on the news, like a hawk on a pullet, and it was not very long before all Palmyra knew about the 'cold piece,' and guessed it was for Percy, in case he should return unexpectedly late at night.

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"It was Mrs. Blymire's constant task to combat the judge's notion that the boy had taken to a life of crime. It clung to the old man with the persistence of a fixed idea. But nobody outside the family dreamed of it until after he began to subscribe for the *Enquirer*. He had long abhorred it with the intense hatred of a war-time Republican for a Copperhead newspaper. He made some excuse at the time about reading what the Democrats had to say for themselves, but that was universally rejected as being unsatisfactory. Elmer Cox, who was reading law in the judge's office, observed that he did not look at the political articles at all, but pored over the criminal news, which is very fully given in that paper. One day the old man nearly fainted at the sight of a paragraph. He read it again and again. Finally he cut it out and put it in his pocketbook. He seemed so distressed that Elmer Cox rested not till he got Henry Enright's *Enquirer* and found, in the place that the judge had scissored out, a dispatch under a Muncie date about a burglar named Blimeyer breaking into a citizen's house and being wounded by the man's shooting a load of bird shot into his legs. The second day's story corrected the name to Bill Meyer, and added that the man was an old thief and 'second-story crook.' Elmer Cox noticed what a load was taken from the old judge's mind, and it was the sentiment of the whole com-

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munity, to whom Elmer Cox reported all that he saw and much that he imagined, that Blymire confidently expected all kinds of 'onriness' of Skinner, and that he had nobody but himself to blame for it if the boy did go wrong and wind up behind the bars.

"One day, about nine or ten years after Percy had disappeared, the judge was called up to Marion to try a case, and in the afternoon, too late to bank it, quite a large sum of money was paid to him in settlement of account of an estate for which he was administrator. He was stopping at the Johnson House, but fell in with two old cronies, and forgot to put the money in the hotel safe. It was a warm night in the early June, so unseasonably warm that the judge found it hard to go to sleep, and so lay awake for some time, musing on what had happened in court during the day and trying to forecast what was to come on the morrow. Whether he slept or woke, he suddenly became conscious of another presence in the room. Rousing to full sense, he saw against the pale square of the open window the black shape of the stranger. The faint clink of silver told the judge that the thief was fumbling in the pockets of the trousers hung over the chair back. He smiled grimly in the darkness to think that the pickings would be but scant, and put his hand under the pillow where his pocketbook, with the

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widow's money in it, neighbored with his revolver. The touch of the cross-hatched butt suggested the question of his legal right to kill the burglar, and his hand closed around the conformable shape. All men would justify his act, and the jury would acquit him without leaving the box. But why slay a man for thirty-five cents?

"The click of his watch guard reminded him that he stood to lose something prized highly, a gold watch that cost $120, presented to him by the Tadmor County bar at the expiration of his term on the bench.

"'Drop that!' he shouted.

"The burglar wheeled quickly, and the next instant there blazed a dazzling light, there came an ear-splitting crash, and something struck the pillow a vicious blow. The thief waited an instant to see if his shot had taken effect.

"That instant was the one that the judge, a squirrel hunter of renown in his younger days, chose to aim at the figure between him and the velvet sky, powdered with faint stars. His shot was followed by a coughing grunt and a long whimper. Then the figure toppled out of the window to the ground with a dull thump, and lay there a formless blot in the gloom.

"In another second the whole hotel was alive. Guests came thronging in, buzzing with inquiries.

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Through a back door, suddenly jerked open, streamed a yellow trapezium of light illuminating the man bubbling his life away on the grass.

"'That's the man I shot!' cried the judge. 'I did it in self-defense. He shot at me first. Before God, it was not murder!'

"He hurriedly dressed and ran down the stairs.

"As he reached the little group, the dying man's legs drew up and extended tremorously, and then lay still forever.

"'I guess he's dead all right,' said the night clerk, and set the lamp down on the ground while he rolled the body so that the light shone on the face. As the features appeared, the judge groaned, reeled, and fell heavily."

Lippincott paused and then added: "He never regained consciousness. They took him home, and a week later he died. Toward the last they heard him say: 'I killed him—I didn't know—' The rest was silence."

"Killed his own son!" whispered Scrimgeour, pallid with horror.

"Strangely enough," continued Lippincott, as if he did not hear, "within an hour after the judge's death, who should drive up to the door but Percy and his wife and baby? It was a hard blow to him that he could not show to the old man his grandson and namesake, the pledge of filial forgiveness."

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Scrimgeour stared at him in amaze and then burst out with: "But you just now said that the judge killed Percy. Shot him."

"Not I. The man the judge killed was named Shafer."

"But how could Alice marry Percy without——"

"Alice didn't marry Percy. She is Mrs. Charles Douthirt. Who ever knew child lovers to mate in mature life? Don't you see that you are the victim of the fictional mind? It was the most unlikely thing in the world that the judge should slay his own son, but that was the only thing you believed could hap——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted the angry Scrimgeour.

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THE MAKIN'S OF ABEL HORN

I

"DIDN'T I tell you!" said Brother Otho Littell to his clerk, Clarence Bowersox. "I jox, if he don't beat the Dutch, that feller."

Clarence had removed his apron and was getting into his overcoat. It was cold out, remarkably cold for the middle of December, and he was hungry for his breakfast after opening up and getting the grocery ready against Mr. Littell came down. He paused to get a good grip on his coat sleeve and to prepare the torn lining of his overcoat sleeve before he inquired: "What feller?"

"W'y, Abel Horn."

"What's he— Well, dod blast the daggone thing, anyhow! I got to get married or git a new overcoat, I do' know which. What's he up to now?"

"W'y, you know that there Christmas-tree celebration we're goin' to have to our church——"

"Is he goin' to be Santy Claus?"

"Um," assented Brother Littell, taking a chew of fine cut and masticating it mournfully. Brother

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Littell had had hopes of being struck by lightning himself. He had not more than hinted his ambition to his wife and to Clarence, but he was a prominent member of Center Street M. E.; he had taught in the Sunday school for years; he had given twenty pounds of candy and a box of oranges to be divided up among the children, and he was, as he said, "about the right build and heft for old Santy," so he had thought that perhaps he might be recognized. He felt it something of a slight that though he was a member of the committee nobody had even so much as mentioned his name, but the prize had been given to Abel Horn as a matter of course.

"W'y, that little sawed-off, dried-up, peaked end o' nothin'!" snorted Clarence, this time succeeding with his sleeve and donning the overcoat by a series of humps and jumps. "What call has he to be Santy Claus? How'd they ever come to pick on him?"

"I jox, I d' know," said Brother Littell. "They did, though. Told me once, he did: 'I never growed a inch tell I was sixteen, and then I shot up luck a weed.' Huh!" Mr. Littell could not talk two minutes about Abel Horn without repeating this joke, for Abel's shortness was proverbial.

"Well, Judas priest! don't you folks to Center Street git about enough o' him every Sunday, lead-

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in' the singin', startin' in before everybody and hangin' on after everybody gits through?"

"I d' know's we're any worse 'n some others. Comp'ny K don't appear to be any ways capable of throwin' off the yoke," retorted Brother Littell. Clarence was a corporal in Company K, and when they got up "The Drummer Boy of Shiloh" he had entertained hopes of being chosen to play the hero. He also had his little ambitions. He had studied elocution and was a subscriber to *The Dramatic Mirror*, but when that thrilling drama of the Civil War was presented at Melodeon Hall the best part he could get was *Orderly to General Grant*, while Abel Horn was cast for the hero. When Company K had the walking match and Private Lafe Henderson, amateur, walked against Miss Elsa von Baum, professional pedestrian, Clarence was to have been the announcer, but Abel Horn got in ahead of him there, too.

Remembering these things, Clarence took his thumb off the latch and returned to Mr. Littell.

"How does he do it? That's what I want to know," he demanded fiercely. "He don't ever think o' things first. He don't hustle 'round and git up su'scriptions or advertisements for the programmes. He don't see to the printin' or do one formed haet, as fur as I can see, to make the entertainment a sucksess, and yit his name is always first on the list

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and he crowds in to be head man in everything. You tell me how he does it."

Apparently Brother Littell refused to divulge the secret. He pursed up his lips, opened the stove door, and spat genteelly on the coals.

"'Tain't as if he was a big, fine-lookin' feller, like Mose Tuttle," persisted Clarence, "or spoke his words nice like— Well, like Henry Miller, though *he* ain't never studied elocution; or was a comical actor like Mr. BoZenta, or could play the piano like Charley Pope, or sing nice like Doc Avery. He ain't got any accomplishment, only jist gall. Folks laugh at him, but they let him ride over 'em, jist the same. Now, why is it?"

"I jox, I d' know," said Mr. Littell thoughtfully. He was remembering what his wife had said to him the night before when he came home and told her what the committee had decided upon. "Huh!" she said. "Huh! And you set there and— Well, if I was a man I'd *be* a man and not let myself be led around by any such Johnny-fly-up-the-creek as Abel Horn. I'd 'a' told him. No, sir, he couldn't run the whole shebang *all* the time, and from everlastin' *to* everlastin'. Why, pa, whatever possessed you?" Mr. Littell said then as he said now: "I jox, I d' know."

"Pity he couldn't do somepin with all that natcherl ability o' his'n for blanneyin' folks into doin' what he wants 'em to," sneered Clarence, forgetting

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how his breakfast was cooling at the Widow Parker's, where he boarded. "Pity he couldn't go into business and make his everlastin' fortune."

"I jox! I bet you he could if he was to try once," said Brother Littell. "He ain't never got around to it, though. Two or three times when he was a boy he wanted to quit school and go to work, but, no, sir! she wouldn't have it. She wasn't goin' to have her Abel ordered around by common folks. She was goin' to bring him up a gentleman. He wanted to go into business, but they was so much hemmin' and hawin' about her lettin' him have the capital that it all fell through."

"Cuts everybody out o' everything," Clarence jawed on, "but I take notice he can't git married. The girls don't want to take up with no sech little, insignificant-lookin' thing."

"Aw, now, don't you fool yourself, Clarence," corrected Mr. Littell, taking his foot down from the fender. "They ain't no man, Clarence, I don't keer how insignificant-lookin' he is or how onry he is, that can't git married to a good woman if he wants to."

"Then how come Abel don't? He flies around amongs' 'em enough to be a marryin' man."

"On account of his ma, I tell you. She made him promise her he wouldn't git married whilst she was alive. Oh, don't you tell me what you'd do and what

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you wouldn't do. You don't know that woman. For all she's so giggly and gushy she makes him walk a chalk when he's with her. He can ride over other folks, but he don't dass to say his soul's his own around home, ner his pa, either, when he was alive. Abel flies around amongs' 'em, yes, but not stiddy with any one girl, if you take notice."

"Lide Burkhart."

"Oh, well, Lide. He's be'n goin' with Lide now sence she put on long dresses. Went with all her sisters, too. Looks like Lide's elected to stay at home. Darn shame, too. Pick o' the whole tribe, I say. Pretty girl and a good girl."

"Right old for a girl," commented Clarence dryly.

"O pshaw! O pshaw! She don't look a day over twenty-nine. I d' know's she *is* much either. She took off that part in 'The Drummer Boy' reel nice, didn't she?"

"Aw, say! She was all right, now, I tell you!" declared the enthusiastic Clarence. "No discountin' her. She's got reel ability. You know that place where she comes in an' says——"

"Folks talked it around that that was about the first time her and Abel ever got a right good chance to make love like they wanted to," interrupted Brother Littell, with more meaning in his words than Clarence appreciated.

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"Her actin' in the love scenes was all right. But he was rotten. W'y, when he come back from the war, you know, and everybody thought he was dead, and he throwed his arms around her—fine situation. I wisht I'd 'a' had that part—w'y, the top o' his head didn' more'n come up to her chin. Jist killed the scene. No heart interest. It was jist funny."

"You run along now and gitch breakfast. Sist' Parker'll be in my wool lettin' you keep the breakfast dishes standin' so long."

"Better order in some more sugar. We're about out, and they'll be a big call for it for their pies and puddens and things."

"I jox! I meant to do that yesterday. Them's nice cranberries, ain't they? I d' know's I ever seen any nicer. You run along now and gitch breakfast and hurry right back."

In one way it would have made Abel Horn feel bad to know what people said about him. Nobody likes to be laughed at. In another way, it would have pleased him. Everybody likes to be envied. He had good enough opinion of himself to be able to treat the talk of some "with silent contempt," as the phrase goes, or to "take it from whence it came," as another phrase goes. As for the other people, he knew that they liked him. Nobody could help doing that, for Abel was as good as wheat. He would have known that if they resented his officiousness it was

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just as we resent the officiousness of a police officer and yet we would not be without the policeman.

Abel was popular with the "younger crowd," and, even if old Marinus Moran declared that he had forgot more religion than Abel Horn ever knew, and Uncle Billy Nicholson and a few more of them up in the Amen corner were opposed to him for having the choir sing voluntaries before meeting took up, the "older crowd" recognized the fact that Abel's membership in Center Street M. E. was no occasion for stumbling, and his loud and tireless leading of the singing at protracted meeting time was a great help. Brother Nicholson was a little behind the times, anyhow. He was opposed to oyster suppers in the church parlors, and just now was going about like a roaring lion raging against having a Christmas tree and Santa Claus.

On the other hand, Abel was thought to have behaved badly in regard to Lide Burkhart. At one time everybody was sure he was going to marry Lide whether or no, but as time went on the town settled down to the belief that Abel had let his mother bluff him out of it. He still went with Lide, and always saw her home from choir meeting, but he went with other girls, too, so it was concluded that he was not even engaged to her.

Everybody said: "Look at it in a business way, of course Abel'd be foolish to take a wife to sup-

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port when he didn't have no way of purvidin' for her. He never learnt a trade and never had no business experience. And it 'u'd be Jerush' Horn all over to turn him out with jist the clothes to his back. She'll have her own way if she busts a hamestring."

Nevertheless, lovers are expected to do rash things, and if Abel Horn had defied his mother all the town would have "gloried in his spunk," even if they had not found employment for him. Jobs are scarce in Minuca Center.

But what about Lide Burkhart? The women folks said that if she was left an old maid it was her own fault, and they didn't pity her one bit. She always did think herself a little above anybody else. If she didn't have any more pluck than to— Well, what was the use? It was her own affair, and if she didn't care any more than she let on to, why, it wasn't any hide off their backs as far as they could see. But still . . .

And that "but still" meant a great deal, please remember. As Minnie De Wees said: "These here long engagements, you needn't tell me. There's a nigger in the woodpile, somewheres or somewheres else. Now you mark."

II

It was a curious fact that Abel should take so much less interest in being Santa Claus than his

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mother. Wouldn't you think, now, that a spare, wiry, little man would regard his selection for such a part as the highest possible tribute to his powers of persuasion? His mother did and chuckled over it no little, but Abel did not seem to care much. She dragged it out of him bit by bit, what he said to them and what they said to him, how Brother Littell had asked if it oughtn't to be a kind of "pussy," heavy-set man, because Santa Claus was kind of "pussy" and heavy-set in the pictures, and how Abel had said, no, it would be better to have an active, light man to climb down on the scantlings of which the scenic chimney was to be built at the back of the pulpit platform.

"He was hintin'," said Mrs. Horn, winking as she bit off her thread. "He was puttin' in a good word for himself there. What they goin' to do with the sofy?"

Abel said nothing, but stared at the stove.

"What they goin' to do with the sofy, I ast you?"

"What sofy?"

"What sofy? W'y, the sofy Brother Longenecker sets on, o' course. What they goin' to do with it? Take it into the study?"

"Oh, the sofy. W'y—ah——"

"W'y what?" snapped his mother after waiting long enough for Abel to come out of his trance.

"W'y, they're goin' to leave it there and build

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the chimney around it. They're goin' to cover it up with red tinsel and stuff so's to look like a bed o' coals. Be easy to light on, too."

"Laws! I don't believe any o' them young ones ever seen a old-fashioned fireplace. I s'pose they won't have no crane nor nothin' to hang a kittle on."

Abel was silent.

"What's got into you here lately?" she demanded. "I don't know what ails you. Set there and set there and never open your head. Ain't you well?"

"W'y, yes, I'm all right."

"Well, you don't act all right. Don't you go to gittin' sick now, not till after Christmas, anyways. I wouldn't miss that for a pretty. Stand up. I want to try this here Santy Claus suit on you. It's goin' to look awful cute. Go easy, now; it's only basted. Now, if it binds you in under the armholes you must tell me," she said, with her mouth full of pins, turning him around and pulling him this way and that as if he were a dummy. "You needn't to mind if it's too full in front. I got to 'low for the stuffin'."

"Put a pillow in?"

"W'y, no, child. I thought some o' usin' excelsior. Don't forget to remind me to get some tomorrow. Hold still. I ain't done marktin' yet. I'm goin' to trim it all up with cotton battin' to look like white fur. I was thinkin' o' swan's-down, but

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they's no use goin' to that expense. I'll make you a pointed cap and sew in some wickin' for hair, and I got a false-face nose with whiskers to it that you can tie over your ears. I picked it out down to Cox's to-day."

Abel put it on to please her and cut up a few monkey shines, but his heart was not in it. He sat around a while, and at last he said he believed he'd go out for a walk. His mother said she'd sit up for him, but he told her not to.

As she sewed she smiled. She was as pleased to dress him up as if he were a doll, and she a girl again. In none of his other public performances had she had the making of his costume. Though he was getting bald in front, he was her "baby" yet, a kind of plaything, not to be seriously regarded. She had done her duty by the four girls by Mr. Horn's first wife, but Abel had been her pet. She could hardly wait till the girls got married and moved away to enjoy life with her own son. She was rather glad he had not grown up to be a tall man. Little men were cuter. Abel was always so cute.

Other people besides her were noticing that Abel was very quiet here lately. Sometimes he would laugh and cut up as usual, and then again they said that he "acted as if somepin was kind of on his mind." They wondered what.

Clarence Bowersox told Brother Littell the Satur-

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day morning before Christmas (it came on Wednesday that year): "Say, whadda you s'pose?"

Mr. Littell was feeling frisky that morning so he made answer: "I can s'pose 'most anything you like, Clarence."

"Aw, now, I ain't foolin'. I'm in earnest. I was comin' along in front o' Burkhart's last night, and lo and behold you there was Abel and Lide a-holdin' a close confab over the gate——"

"He always takes her home from choir meetin's. That don't signify nothin'."

"Wait till I tell you. We was walkin' along slow——"

"Who's we?"

"W'y, me and this party I was escortin' home. And jist as we——"

"I thought you and Gertie had broke it off?"

"Well, so we did, but we made it up ag'in. I jist ignored her, let on I didn't know she was alive, but when I went there yisterday morning for the order she come out, and first thing you know we was good friends ag'in, same as ever, and I ast her if I could call for her in the evenin'—you know they're trimmin' up the Prispaterian church, her an' a lot more an'——"

"What's that got to do with Lide and Abel?"

"Well, I'd tell you if you'd only keep still long enough to let me. We was standin' still, kind o',

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and all of a sudden I heard Lide speak up: 'I jist can't stand it this way no longer!' she says, her voice all trimbly and excited, like she was a-cryin'. Or, 'It jist can't go on this way no longer.' I won't be sure which. And Abel ketched sight of us and says: 'Ssh! Here comes somebody,' and we come on past and didn't hear no more. But I seen her wipe her eyes or leastways she put her handkerchief up. Now what about that?"

"I jox! I wonder!" said Mr. Littell, half whispering.

"Well," said Clarence grimly, looking to one side. "There you are. There's somepin' up now, sure as you're a foot high."

Mr. Littell meant as much as anything to tell this to his wife when he went home to dinner that noon, and to ask her what she thought about it. But it was a very busy morning and he forgot. That night at supper he knew there was something he wanted to say, but he had to hurry back to the store and he never did think of it until the cat was out of the bag entirely. Mrs. Littell told him then she was just provoked at him, so she was. She never saw such a man.

III

I don't know what gets into the days before Christmas to make them drag along so, but even

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the longest days will pass, so that finally seven-thirty Christmas eve did come around and the Center Street M. E. children, and a lot more that began to go to Sunday school about that time, found themselves packed in the pews, not in the regular places for their classes, but the infant class in the front seats, and so on back to the older members of the congregation. In the right-hand Amen corner were the children from the "Barefoot" church up in Stringtown (Faith Mission was the right name for it). The shabby little young ones in quaint, bunchy, made-over clothes were the guests of Center Street for this occasion. Lide Burkhart had them in charge, because Clara JoHantgen, who had drilled them, had suddenly taken a bad sore throat. Little Rosetta Smith, one of old Very Dirty Smith's thirteen or fourteen, sat next to Lide, and kept looking up into her face. Lide smiled down at her. She was a pretty little thing. She made signs she wanted to whisper to her. Lide bent down. She put her arms around Lide's neck.

"Teacher," she whispered. "Are they any Santy Claus?"

"Why, yes," answered Lide. "You just wait and you'll see him."

"Aw, now, you're kiddin'."

"Honest," said Lide. "Cross my heart." And she did.

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The child gave a happy sigh. It was all right if teacher crossed her heart.

The left-hand Amen corner was where the choir sat. Right by them was the door that led downstairs to the pastor's study. A row of screens masked the approach from the study to the back of the scenic chimney down which Santa Claus was to climb. Arching above it on the wall, tacked on the mackerel sky that showed between the pillars of the marble temple painted on the plaster, was the motto: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST," made of cedar. I need not tell you that the N and the S were 'hind side before. They always are.

But the main thing was the Christmas tree, twinkling and glittering with its candles and fruitage of gilded glass. Yards and yards of strung popcorn looped from branch to branch whereon hung hundreds of red mosquito netting bags of candy. The air was spicy with oranges, and though the children from the Barefoot church swallowed and swallowed, their chins were wet most of the time, the smell of candy and oranges was so strong.

Everybody was on the broad grin and the children jumped and fidgeted and whispered, and little Selma Morgenroth, who had never been to Sunday school in her life until the week before, got so excited when she saw another little girl she knew that

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she cried: "O Maggie! Oo-hoo!" and fluttered her hand at her.

The nervous tension was very near the breaking point when Mr. Perkypile, the superintendent, came forward and stood by the Christmas tree to say: "The school will now come to order. We will open the exercises by singing number thirty-seven. Number thirty-seven. Now, children, you all know this, and I want you to sing out now. Don't be afraid to let the people hear how nice you can sing." Number thirty-seven was "Merry, Merry Christmas Bells," and in their efforts to sing out the children scowled and twisted their jaws, and almost tore the lining out of their throats. If you had not known they were singing you would have thought they were being skinned alive, by the sound of it.

Brother Longenecker offered prayer, which he had the grace to make a short one, and then he talked about the first Christmas that ever was.

How beautiful that story is! When our first parents peered through the guarded gateway of the Eden they had lost forever, how sadly lovely must have seemed that glowing sward, those waving branches in whose pleasant shade they nevermore might walk again. Something of their longing makes our hearts ache as we turn backward for a moment to the shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. The soft Judean heaven

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bends above them, vast, silent, patterned with far-off shining stars. On the dim sky line rise formless blots of shadow, hills and clumps of trees by day. The dried grass whispers in the gentle wind. A sheep bell tinkles softly. A lambkin's fluttering cry arises and is hushed. A twig snaps loudly in the stillness.

O shepherds, drowse not! This is the Holy Night of all that were and shall be. This is the solemn moment round which, as round the polestar, circles the vast perimeter of all time. The world awaits it, breathless, hushed.

On the instant the dark shadows on the horizon's rim leap into their day's likeness in a flood of light. The dazzled shepherds shade their eyes. A radiant stranger stands before them, his wings a-quiver with arrested flight. "Fear not," he says, "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

There is a moment of silence. The shepherds hear the blood thudding in their ears, and then the heavens flash with rosy light. The sky is thronged with rank on rank of quiring angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will

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toward men." Rank on rank they swim in the still air, each glistening chanter bearing his part, treble and counter, tenor and bass, sweeter their voices, ah, sweeter far than any cathedral choir! The floating skeins of melody weave in and out in heavenly polyphony, twining and intertwining till they knot at last in sevenfold amen. The light fades slowly as the music dies. The shadows on the sky line creep nearer and nearer till once more only the pale stars twinkle overhead. The shepherds hearken, but they hear only the tall grasses whispering in the night wind, only the tinkling of the sheep's bell, only the lambkin's fluttering cry that rises and is hushed again. The shepherds sigh and we sigh with them. So soon those angel visitors are gone and gone from earth forever! It is in vain we stretch our hands beseeching:

> Angels, sing on, your faithful watches keeping,
> Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above.

Ah, happy shepherds! Would that we, too, might now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass! But our Eden is closed to us. From among the thorns and thistles we peer through the guarded gateway of our childhood's faith and mark how lovely are the waving branches in whose pleasant shade we nevermore may walk again.

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Well, that wasn't the way Brother Longenecker told it. He rocked back and forth on heels and toes, his finger tips joined together and a smile's corpse coming and going on his mouth. "Dear children," said he, "who can tell me what is this day we celebrate?"

"Christmas!" They all knew that.

"Christmas. Yes, it is Christmas. And why is it the gladdest and happiest day of all the year?"

A confused babble out of which one might pick the shriek of, "'Cause we get Christmas gif's."

"Yes. We get Christmas gifts and we give Christmas gifts. And why do we give Christmas gifts? In memory of the greatest Christmas gift the world has ever had. Now what is the greatest Christmas gift in all the world?"

Silence at first and then one little boy pipes up: "A pair o' skates!"

In the laughter that followed Brother Longenecker could be seen rather than heard to say: "No, no." One little girl stuck up her hand and snapped her fingers till she got the floor, primly squalling: "Jesus Christ was born on Christmas Day," switching the tail of her dress to one side as she bounced down again.

That was the way that Brother Longenecker told the Bethlehem story.

After he got through, Miss McGoldrick read off

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a whole lot of poetry that she made up herself and little Curg Emerson spoke a piece about:

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house
Not a creature was stirring—not even a mouse.

Maybe you have heard it. It is a nice piece, but poor little Lycurgus was so scared he didn't know what to do with himself and he completely forgot all the gestures his ma had taken such pains to teach him. He kept opening and shutting his hands and trying to swallow a terrible lump in his throat.

I can't begin to tell you all the things that they put in to prolong the agony and keep the children waiting. But finally the screens that masked the way from the study began to wabble and then the chimney shook and there! down bounced Santa Claus on the fiery sofa and out on the floor, the funniest little, fat, red-nosed man that ever was, with white whiskers and a red suit all trimmed with white fur.

A shrill scream of joyous welcome greeted him, and even the solemn-faced bunchy little "Barefeet" with the knit hoods clapped their skinny hands. It made Lide catch her breath to see them. In an excess of motherly feeling she hugged little Rosetta to her. The child looked up smiling. It was all true about old Santy, "no kiddin'." But when he came over to where they were, to hand them each the little bag of candy and the orange, they shrank from him.

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It is not good to come too close to supernatural beings. They feared the Greeks even bearing gifts. But only for a moment. And then what a crunching of candies and ripping open of oranges! For that matter, the whole church was soon a shambles of sweets, and when the sexton came to clean up he had no words to express his detestation and horror of the whole wretched business.

"Jist look at that there carpet!" he quivered. "Look at it! Now, ain't that—" But he could say no more.

Little Rosetta sucked her candy stingily, but saved her orange, she told Lide, for her sick ma. She watched Santa hopping around in comic haste, her eyes round with wonder. Suddenly she dropped her orange and clutched the top of the partition that masked the front pew in which she sat. She stood up and screamed. But the hubbub was so loud that her shrill voice was unheard.

"Oh, look at Santy!" she cried. "Oh, look at him! Looky! looky!"

Everybody else had said that hours before. In a transport of rage at being ignored the child began slapping her neighbors and jumping up and down.

"Here, here!" corrected Lide. "Behave yourself, little girl."

"Look at Santy! look at Santy!" she sobbed, and

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flung herself into Lide's arms frantically. "Teacher, teacher, look at Santy!"

Lide gave a look and then, placing her hands on the partition, vaulted over it as she had not done since she was a girl. She rushed into the altar tearing off her coat as she ran.

A pale blaze flickered on the cotton trimming of Abel's suit.

It spread like fire in powder. He was all aflame in an instant. He tore wildly at his garments. The children laughed to see his antics, and then their laugh died in horror in their throats, and they rose to their feet gasping.

Lide was fighting with the wild creature trying to muffle him in her coat, while he threw her away from him writhing in agony.

A big hobbledehoy sitting next to Clarence started up bawling, "Fi—!" But Clarence clapped his hand over his mouth, snarling, "Shut up, you damn fool! Do you want everybody tromped to death? Set down and keep quiet, or I'll knock your head off."

"Keep your seats, everybody!" cried Mr. Longenecker. "There is no danger!"

But the word "danger" frightened them and with one impulse the packed pews strove to empty themselves at once. The men clambered over the seats and trod on shrieking women and children. Clarence

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leaped into the aisle and bellowed, "Ladies first! Git back there, you! Easy, now. No crowdin'! Ladies first!"

Henry Myrice came bursting down the aisle yelling: "Lemme out! lemme out!" Bang! went Clarence's fist on Henry's jaw. The man toppled over against a pew.

"What's the matter with you?" he whimpered.

"Ladies first!" shouted Clarence. "Next man gits it jist the same. Ladies first!"

Over in the other aisle Lester Pettitt caught up the word. "Ladies first!" he kept crying, and presently the men and boys recovered their senses and waited their turn to get out.

Dr. Avery, who had sung a solo that night and was near the altar, ran to Lide's assistance.

"Don't try to take his things off here," he said to her. "Let's get him out. Here, somebody take a hold." But nobody heeded. The librarian of the Sunday school could think of nothing more instant than blowing out the candles on the Christmas tree and went hopping around puffing at them. Mr. Perkypile stood perfectly still, fear-mazed. Lide gave one look around, then stooping she lifted the shoulders of the groaning man and kissed him on the mouth.

"Come on, doctor," she said, as she rose staggering with her burden. "You take his feet. I can

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manage. Over to my house. We live across the street."

When Mrs. Horn came out of her faint they led her down into the study. She stopped her little cries of "Oh, oh, oh!" to look through the open door at the crowd on Burkhart's veranda. With swift accession of strength she ran thither.

When she entered the room, Dr. Avery looked up from the work of stripping the charred costume from the sufferer. "Don't let anybody in," he said imperiously.

"I'm his mother," cried Mrs. Horn. "I guess I'll come in if I want to. O my boy! O Abel, Abel, you'll be all scarred up if you ever do get well! O dear! O dear! Why didn't you take him home? Home's the best place. Yes, home's the best place for my poor, poor boy!"

"Madam, you'll have to keep quiet or I can't have you in here," said Dr. Avery.

"*She's* in here!" screamed Mrs. Horn. "Pretty thing if I can't be with my own boy. What right has *she* got here? I should think if she had any decency about her——"

"I have every right in the world here," said Lide quietly, "I am his wife. Just a second, doctor," and she went on deftly scissoring away the smoldering fabric.

His wife! Abel looked at his mother and nodded

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painfully. She gave a low cry and tottered out of the room.

. . . . . .

It never rains but it pours in Minuca Center, and the excitement over the panic in the church was hardly greater than the discovery that Abel Horn and Lide Burkhart had been married for more than two years, and had kept it a secret.

"I wouldn't 'a' put it apast Abel Horn to do sech a fool trick," said Sarepta Downey, talking it over with Lester Pettitt and his wife, "but la me! I did think Lide had more sense. Now if it was me gittin' married I'd want everybody to know it."

Mr. Pettitt kept a straight face.

"A man's natcherly romantic, anyhow," continued the little old maid, "and then his ma bein' so set on him stayin' single while she lived. But mercy! It's different with a woman. She's got to——"

Mrs. Pettitt frowned and shook her head, giving it a little jerk toward Janey, who was listening eagerly. "What's Miz Horn goin' to do about it?" she asked by way of diversion. "I mean old Miz Horn. Sounds funny to call her '*old* Miz Horn,' don't it?"

"Oh, she says he's made his bed and he's got to lay in it. She found out he was goin' to git well, though, before she said it. Say. Do you know, they say he won't be marked up hardly a bit when his

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hair and eyebrows grows out? Yes, sir, she's done with him, his ma is. So she says. Not a cent will she give him. Ain't that green, though?"

"Abel'll come out top o' the heap," said Lester. "I'll bet on Abel."

So he did. The event was, as everybody said, "the makin's" of him. About then folks began to talk of a trolley road. Abel undertook to secure the property owners' consent and engineer the franchise. If he never again appeared in any entertainment it was because he was too busy bullyragging and "blanneying" people into giving him rights of way for nothing or the next thing to it. He is something of a magnate in that line of business and making money hand over fist.

His mother? Oh, she's quarreled with Abel and Lide a dozen times since then. There was a grand flare-up when they wouldn't name the baby Abelina Jerusha. Yes, it's a girl; born the latter part of the next April after. Sweet little thing, too.

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THE LOVE STORY OF ROBERT PROUTY

I

IT was hard that Bob Prouty should have been dismissed just at the beginning of the dull season, when it was useless to look for employ in his line; but a calamity that brought him home from New York for a good long visit, the first in years, was not one to grieve over very much.

The difficult question: "What do you do with all your money?" had been answered as well as it ever can be, the question being from the standpoint of Minuca Center, the answer from the standpoint of New York. Followed the next important query—did Bob "go" with anybody there? Mrs. Prouty concluded that it must be a very queer place indeed if it was as hard there for a young man to get acquainted with nice girls as Bob made out it was.

"Don't you go to church, ever?" she asked.

"Yes, sometimes. No, not regularly to any one place. Well, to Trinity as often as anywhere. They had good singing there."

"Well, now, I tell you what you do," advised

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Mrs. Prouty. "When you go back in the fall you go call on the pastor—what's his name?"

"The rector of Trinity? Dr. Dix."

"Why, is he there yet?" interjected Mr. Prouty. "He is, eh? They must like his preaching pretty well."

"You go call on this Mr. Dix, and tell him you attend his church, and then you take in their sociables and oyster suppers and whatever doings they have in the parlors of the church in the long winter evenings. If I was you, I'd go to the young people's meetings, and join the choir. Why, you'd be acquainted with lots of nice girls in no time, scarcely."

As Bob dramatized these suggestions, they seemed pathetically comic. His mother divined his smile rather than saw it.

"Oh, whatever church you like," she made haste to add. "There's plenty of nice girls in all of them. I just worry and worry about you, away off there with nobody to look after you and see that your socks aren't one mass of holes. You ought to get married. It would be the making of you, if you could get the right kind of a wife. And you could, too—no bad habits, and strong and healthy and fine looking—oh, you needn't say 'Huh!' for you are; I don't care if you are my boy. You could take your pick of them."

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"Yes, I s'pose," scoffed Bob. "Just walk up and say, 'I choose you,' and she'd come right along."

"Oh, now, you know what I mean. It ain't right for you to stay single, and you going on twenty-seven."

"Yes," jeered Bob; "I'd look well with a wife right now, wouldn't I?"

"O fiddle!" replied his father. "You'll find something as good as you had, as soon as business opens up again in the fall. On the wages you were getting you could easy keep yourself and a wife, and lay up money. See here!"

And with a pencil and the back of an envelope, Mr. Prouty demonstrated again the ancient paradox that what will just about do for one is an ample competence for two.

II

The shame of being idle and living off his father for a whole summer Bob Prouty found more tolerable than he had imagined. It was not such a slow little town, after all. There were the annual lawn *fêtes* of the various churches, each of which was attended by the members of the other churches with an evangelical charity beautiful to behold. There were all kinds of picnics, whereat assisted many young women who remembered him much better than he remembered them. Some of these young

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women were pretty. Marie Hutchins was an undoubted beauty, and none of them was as provincial and countrified as he had feared.

Miss Hutchins' beauty had dazzled him at first, but not for long. Beyond the limit of an extravagant compliment from him, a flashing of her big, blue eyes, with "Oh, yes, you say that to everybody," and his succeeding protest, he found it difficult to extend a conversation. Jennie Lineacre was beautiful, too, in a graver, more statuesque way; but she was so patently affected that her hour was brief. Grace Hoover was the jolliest little thing, "the life of the party," as they say, but to be always on the lookout for a witticism and to be obliged to cap it with another was too great a strain.

That was the worst of most of them, Bob found —they thought they had to exert themselves to entertain. Perhaps it was because she wasn't eternally clacking away at him that he often found himself in the company of Alice La Fetra. He had known Alice since he was a boy, for his mother and hers were old friends. They swapped patterns and recipes, and were always running back and forth. Bob and Alice had never known much of each other, for she was younger than he, and a girl. The last time he was at home she was gangling and awkward. Since then she had improved, and was now not bad looking, though he would not call her beautiful. But, he ad-

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mitted to himself, he had very seldom seen a woman that he would call really beautiful. What was most in Alice's favor was that she didn't make him tired. What she said was sensible and well expressed; but if she didn't say anything, she was company, just the same. She was going to teach a kindergarten in the fall, having finished her preparatory studies. She was musical, though not a wonderful player or singer. She was a musician rather than a performer. There is a difference.

Bob's mother delighted to pretend that he was her little boy still. It saved her so many steps for him to "run over to Mrs. La Fetra's" and do this, that, and the other errand. Mollie and Sue La Fetra were away for the summer, and Alice was the only one that Mrs. La Fetra had to send on errands to Mrs. Prouty's. Both families belonged to the same Methodist church, and, naturally enough, Alice and Bob walked home together on Sunday mornings with their parents. It was the custom there for the young people to attend other churches in the evening; and if Bob asked Alice to go with him, it was because it was less trouble to do that than to hunt up another girl. Then there were these picnics and lawn *fêtes*, and walks to the Sulphur Spring. He liked to row, but it was a bore to go alone, so he took Alice, because she didn't squeal and wiggle about and dabble her hands in the water.

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Most of Bob's schoolmates had gone away from Minuca Center. Those who were left, while good-hearted and all that, were rather limited in their ideas. Out of sheer inability to pass the time in any other satisfactory way, he got into the habit of going over to the La Fetras in the evening, instead of downtown.

When Frank Woodmansee told Bob that Harry Allgire had asked if he was "going with" Alice La Fetra, it first angered and then amused him. He told his mother about it.

"Harry Allgire? Isn't he the fellow that's 'going with' that De Wees girl?"

"Going with her? Why, it's the worst case you ever saw. She walks down to meet him coming home to dinner, and walks back with him after. We meet them every place, Alice and I."

"Oh, well, I wouldn't pay any attention to it, if I was you," said Mrs. Prouty. "Alice is a nice enough girl, but——"

"Why, that's just it. Of course she's nice, and I like her immensely, but as far as 'going with' her is concerned, why, I never thought of such a thing. And I don't suppose she has, either."

"No, I reckon not," said Mrs. Prouty, but she did not seem to be so positive about it as her son. "Her mother was saying—I don't know as I ought to tell you."

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"Oh, go on, tell me. What did she say?"

"Well, come to think, I don't know as I can tell just in so many words; but the amount of it was that she thought Alice thought a good deal of you." She eyed him sharply to see how he took it. He looked very grave. Then she added: "She said Alice said there was something *to* what you had to say. I think myself she thinks you're just about right."

Bob was troubled in his mind. He hadn't supposed that Alice would attach any more importance to their friendship than he had. It was a funny thing if a fellow couldn't be civil to a girl without her going and falling in love with him. It just spoiled everything. He was in no position to pay serious attentions to any woman. He was not employed, and Lord knew when he would be. It was no easy thing to get a place as good as the one that he had given up because he would not submit to be talked to as Maxwell had talked to him. Even so, the salary was none too much for one, let alone two, he didn't care how his father figured.

Anyhow, he meant to look around a little before settling on a final choice. On the train coming West with him there was a girl. She was with her father, so he had not— But he had caught her looking at him once. Now, a girl like that, for instance!

Alice was nice, no doubt about that. He would

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like to take her and show her around New York. She would appreciate it all, because she had such sensible ideas. He'd like to take her to the Metropolitan Opera House. It was something pathetic to think that a girl with her taste in music, and her understanding of it, had never even heard "Faust." It would be a pleasure to watch her pleasure. And he would be proud to be seen with her, for, though she wasn't exactly a beauty, she looked about as well as any girl he was acquainted with. She was distinguished in a way, and her face was so expressive. She was stylish, too, and what she wore was in good taste. A man might do worse than marry her. In fact, the fellow that got her would be distinctly lucky; but it was out of the question for Bob to think of that, because he didn't love her.

He thought a great deal of her, it was true. She was such good company. She didn't make him tired, as other girls did. But if she was going to fall in love with him, why—he wished he hadn't said he would be over that evening. But he had said so, and she would be disappointed if he didn't call.

"Ah, Bob, going courting?" gayly inquired his father as his son came out on the veranda after supper. "I see you're all togged out."

"No, indeed," replied Mr. Robert Prouty gravely, determined to put an end to such nonsense. "No, just making a call."

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"Well, give her my love," returned his father with ready wit. "And say! Tell La Fetra I can beat him a game of cribbage if he'll come over." Mr. Prouty turned to confront his wife's disapproving visage. "Why, what's wrong now?" he asked guiltily as soon as Bob was out of earshot.

"Henry Prouty! For a man of your age, I do think you have as little judgment as anybody I ever saw—tow-row-rowing at the boy that way, so all the neighbors can hear you!"

"Well, what of it?"

"Good land! Can't you see?"

"Why, do you think—" Mr. Prouty finished his question by inclining his head toward the La Fetra residence.

"Think? I don't *think* anything about it."

III

Bob and Alice were talking, with the gate between them, when Mr. and Mrs. La Fetra returned from spending the evening at the Proutys'.

"Well, sir, I beat that dad of yours four straight games out of five. He can't play cribbage a little bit," was Mr. La Fetra's loud boast, synchronous with his wife's reproof of Alice for standing out in the night air with nothing around her.

Bob and Alice both essayed at once to unlatch the

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gate. Her fingers brushed the back of his hand, and lingered the fraction of a second longer than instantaneity. The nerves there, commonly so dull, leaped into alert consciousness. Fire and frost thrilled his back, a sensation strange but delightful.

It puzzled him, for nothing could be surer than that he was not in love with Alice La Fetra. He knew what love was, both by reading and by observation. He had once roomed with a fellow named Kirke, who "had it bad" for the fifth time, and who was destined to have it three times more before he married the woman who afterwards divorced him. The fellow, who had once been jolly, moped and sighed and shook his head. He sat for hours with his elbow on the table and his cheek in his hand, so that his lips were all pushed out of shape. He used to sing "Call Me Thine Own," in a voice like a gang-saw going through a knot. Nothing like that ailed Bob; hence he was not in love.

He decided that the thrill he had experienced was due to nervous apprehension that it was a sign that she loved him. If she did, why, then, he ought in honor to marry her. He would keep it from her that he did not love her, and never let her find it out. Supposing, though, that after they had been married some time, he should one day meet a woman with whom there would be no question of esteem and admiration, but of love itself, the kind you read

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about, the kind that makes you crazy after the adored one—then what? Wouldn't he wish then that he had waited for the grand passion, and not have contented himself with a feeble imitation of it? His life would be blighted, and not his alone, but this other woman's and Alice's. He felt a pale regret for the other woman, but a sorrow for Alice's fate that amounted to a blushing shame. It would be dog mean of him if, in this future madness, he should be tempted to desert her and—and perhaps her children.

What could he do? Perhaps she had not gone such lengths in love of him that to retrace her steps was impossible. If he should leave for New York to-morrow—but he had made an engagement to take her for a drive to-morrow. And what was the use of going to New York so long before the season opened?

He resolved to let the affair die out. It ought not to be broken off suddenly, for that would make talk and wound her; but gradually, little by little.

IV

"Well, Alice, child, I can't advise you. Every time we talk it over, it comes to the same thing. If you think he's the best you can do——"

"Mother!" Such commercialism was revolting.

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"You needn't fly up at me that way. You know what I mean. If you like him——"

"Oh, I *like* him, but that isn't it."

"Well, then, what is the trouble? Don't you think he likes you?"

"Well, of course, he hasn't *said*, but——"

Mrs. La Fetra smiled with compressed lips, and waited in silence.

"If I was right sure I *loved* him—that is, loved him as much as he loves me—O mother, I *know* he loves me, I just *know* he does! If I really loved him, I wouldn't hesitate one second about giving up my career. And I can't bear to!"

"Well, Alice, if I was you, I wouldn't cross the bridge till I got to it. You'll do as you please anyhow, so I don't see as there's much use of my saying anything."

V

The breaking off was indeed gradual—so gradual as to be imperceptible to any but Bob. It was so hard to begin without wounding Alice's feelings; and he could not bring himself to do that in the least. If he left off calling, she would think she had offended him, and would torture herself trying to think how. So in the morning he felt obliged to ask her: "What are you going to do this afternoon? What do you say if we go boating?"—or walking or whatever it

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might be. In the afternoon he found himself making an appointment for the evening, and in the evening for the next day.

But though the breaking off was thus gradual, it was not to be understood that there had ever been any "going with" her. It made him furious to see the knowing way Harry Allgire and that De Wees girl grinned when they met Alice and him. If they could see how silly they looked!

"Isn't it sickening?" he said to Alice after they had passed the two spoons. "Isn't that the worst case of puppy love you ever did see?"

"Awful," she agreed.

He remembered her saying that, because the next instant she clung wildly to him for protection. Brown's big St. Bernard bounced out upon them, barking furiously. Bob had only to pretend to pick up a stone, and the mere gesture scared the foolish young dog, who dropped his tail and fled.

"Oh, he frightened me so!"

Alice sighed and clung to him, and looked up into his eyes gratefully. He took her hand in both his and petted it. It was lucky that they came out immediately from under the thick beeches in front of Brown's into the bright light of the electric in front of Hill's, for Bob felt the most insane desire to crush her against him roughly, so that she should cry out: "Bob! You're hurting me!"

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The momentary madness left him trembling. His heart hammered, and he had to keep swallowing. It was an impulse at once exultant and regrettable. He flushed to think how she would scorn him if she had dreamed that he was even tempted to "hug" her. A vulgarian like Harry Allgire probably bragged about "hugging" his "girl." It was a shame to think of such a word in the same hour with Alice.

VI

"You're not going out to-night, are you, Robbie?" pleaded his mother.

"Why, yes, I thought I would," he answered guiltily, halting on the bottom step of the veranda. "I told—I said I'd be over this evening for a little while."

"The very last evening!" she said reproachfully. "We haven't seen hardly anything of you all summer, and I laid out to have such a nice long visit with my boy. And you're going away to-morrow noon! Dear knows when I'll ever see you again—maybe never." Her voice quavered as she dramatized the worst. She came down the steps so as to put her hand on his farther shoulder and let her wrist lie against his neck. Bob looked down and stirred the gravel with his toe. "You're the only boy I've got,"

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she added, and Bob could tell there were tears in her eyes. He dared not look to see. They even began to come into his own eyes. What a hypocrite he was, he thought! How heartless in him, after that appeal, still to wish to go and leave her!

"I won't stay but a little while," he said to his mother, but not less to his conscience.

She suddenly bent down and kissed him. She thrust his face against her bosom and gripped it there.

"My boy!" she half whispered, half groaned, then released him and fled up the steps and into the house.

Bob knew he ought to have followed her. He said so to himself. He said he must be void of natural affection to be so selfish, so unable to make adequate response to love lavished upon him by his mother and—Alice.

His progress to the La Fetra house, though, was as steady as if none of these thoughts had entered his mind. His excuse was that he was going to stay only a few minutes; then he would return and spend the last evening of his visit with his parents.

VII

Mr. Prouty's ear noted a little quivering sigh as his wife cleared the supper table. He looked up from

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the Cincinnati paper and saw that she had her under lip bitten fast and that her chin was trembling.

"Why, what's the matter, mother? What's the matter?"

He rose to meet her as with a whimper she ran to him and flung her arms upon his shoulder.

"There, there!" he soothed her, and patted her softly. As he bent his neck to kiss her, his glasses slid off, and his awkward stooping for them made her titter hysterically. He drew her down into his lap in the Morris chair, where she made him understand.

"It's foolish of me, I know," she fluttered, "to be so jealous-hearted, but I can't help it."

"I know, I know," he said, and stroked her hair; "but, deary, it has to be that way. You know that. He's got to make another place and call it home. He must forsake us and cleave to her. Ah me! It seems only yesterday since we—" He kept silence and stroked her hair a long time, then: "Say, do you know what he asked me the other day? I thought there was something up. He said: 'Father, what did you say to mother when you proposed to her?'"

Mrs. Prouty mused smilingly, and then asked: "What did you tell him?"

"I told him I didn't remember. Been so long ago. What *did* I say?"

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"Laws, I don't know!"

"And what did *you* say?"

"You know well enough what I said."

"Did you tell me you loved me?"

"I don't know. I reckon so. I was green enough in those days to say 'most anything. Let me up. I've got to clear away the supper things."

"Oh, they can wait. Do you love me now? Tell me."

"Oh, behave yourself! Don't be so soft."

But she kissed him and twined a lock of his thin hair about her fingers.

"But do you? Tell me."

"Of course I do. Do you think I'd have put up with you all these years if I hadn't?" She was reminiscently silent for a time, and then she sighed: "I don't believe you ever loved me as much as I loved you."

It was more a question than a reproach; but he felt the reproach, and made haste to declare:

"Oh, yes, I did. Yes, I did. Maybe I wasn't as demonstrative. I never was much of a hand to make a display, but——"

In the pause that followed he asked himself, had he ever loved his wife as much as she loved him? Did he really love her now? Was it love, or had they grown together so that wrenching them apart would deal a pang so terrible, so agonizingly terrible, as

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barely to escape being mortal? If he should lose her! O good God, avert it! He shuddered at the thought.

The same idea in her mind made her sigh deeply. Eager to dismiss a subject so disquieting, she rose and went about her work, while her husband took up the Cincinnati paper.

VIII

Bob stayed only a little while. Soon after he appeared, her father and mother went to bed at an astonishingly early hour for them. He and Alice chatted a few minutes, as it seemed, and then he rose to go.

On opening the front door, the world without was stiller than common. He took her hand in his to bid her good-by. He felt strangely sad and lonely. To-morrow he was to return to New York and try for his life to find a finger hold upon the face of that sheer precipice. It is a thing to make a cold sickness at the heart. The pleasant summer idleness was ended. This was the last of it, and there are few things of which we can say without emotion: "This is the last!"

It was the last time, too, that he should talk with Alice. Perhaps he did not love her, but he would miss her terribly. It cut him cruelly to think how he

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would miss her, and he tightened his grip upon her hand, which lingered still in his.

Her gaze suddenly dropped before his eyes, and her bosom rose and fell in labored breathing. There recurred the wild desire to crush her roughly to his breast—roughly, so that she should cry out. He could not withstand it. As he seized her brutally, she turned her face upward to his, and he kissed her again and again and yet again, unnumbered times, frantically, blindly. The hot blood thumping in every artery dizzied him. His chest panted as if with sobbing. He choked. His ears rang. His fingers shuddered violently as he twined them feverishly in hers.

"I do love you! I do love you!" he muttered hoarsely. "Do you love me? My darling! My darling!"

"Yes!" she whispered, and her soul looked through her eyes at him. What beautiful eyes she had! "Yes, yes, I do love you!"

Entering his own gate, he heard the town clock strike the hour. The bell sounded once—but there was no second note. Hearkening, he heard the crash of freight cars in the yards a mile away. He could even distinguish the words of the night yardmaster bawling an order to the pony engineer. But he heard no second bell stroke. Astonished, he looked at his watch. It was one o'clock! He had thought it might be ten, surely not eleven.

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IX

Bob found New York even lonelier than he had feared. He had taken a hall room and in a cheaper boarding house, and had shunned his old acquaintances, that he might the better husband his little capital. It proved harder than he thought to "catch on." It is a long story, this looking for work, long and heartbreaking. But for Alice's letter coming every day, he could not have stood it. How they bore him up! How full of vivid promise was the assurance in her writing that the darkest hour was just before the dawn!

He missed her more than he could tell. She was the dearest girl! He wished it was in his nature to be more loving than he was, to love her as she loved him. That burst of passion the night he parted from her he knew now for what it was. He was glad that her pure spirit had not guessed it. If he could get a little bit ahead, so that he could marry, he would marry her. It would be terrible, though, if, after all, another woman should appear and he should fall in love with her—in genuine love, this time. It would break Alice's heart. He might better go to his grave not knowing what real love was than that he should break the heart of such a girl as Alice.

He must get something to do, even if it was

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not in his line. For Alice's sake, he would sink his pride. They made money selling books, he had heard. It could be no harder than asking for employ.

Just below Twenty-second Street, on his way down Fifth Avenue to a subscription book house, he noted Maxwell coming toward him. He pretended not to see him; but Maxwell walked up, stuck out his hand, and said:

"Hello!"

Bob answered and took the hand. There was no sense in being rude. If Maxwell had been in the wrong, Bob had not been wholly in the right.

"Where you been all summer? In your yacht?"

Bob smiled grudgingly.

"Out in Ohio," he said. "Just got back a couple of weeks ago."

"Doing anything?"

Bob winced. Maxwell noted it as he revolved his cigar in his mouth and shut his left eye to exclude the smoke.

"Well, not exactly."

"Now, look here," said Maxwell, taking Bob by the arm and leading him to a store front, out of the tide of travel. "There wasn't any need for you to get your back up the way you did. You might know I had to call you down about that Camden order. I never thought you were going to fly off the handle

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and quit. I was mighty sorry about that. I always liked you and liked your ways."

He stopped and looked steadily at Bob, who swallowed and picked at a roughness in the painted iron. He had been a fool. He saw it now. Maxwell had been in the right, or not enough in the wrong to make a fuss about it. He was just going to say so when Maxwell spoke:

"Well, I must run along. Glad to see you again. Oh, by the way, Robbins is sick. Went home yesterday. Think you could take charge of his department for him till he gets back? All right! See you tomorrow morning, then. So long! I've got to run."

X

Many, many verses of the old air indifferently known as "Rousseau's Dream," "Days of Absence," "Go Tell Aunt Rhody," and "Greenville," all to four syllables repeated over and over again, had been sung and sung. They had been followed by long-drawn susurrations, by silence, and by a stealthy withdrawal from the room with the white iron crib in it.

On the front stoop Rob and this Mr. Maxwell, a friend of his, were talking as they smoked their after-dinner cigars and admired one of the sunsets for which Long Island is so justly famed. She could

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hear most of what Rob said, but Mr. Maxwell had a more muffled way of speaking.

"Oh, that's all my eye!" Rob said. "I used to be afraid of the same thing myself, but I tell you this other woman won't come along unless you're looking for her. And if this certain party you speak of is as fond of you as you say—" An interval, and then: "I understand. I understand. We were just supposing. If she really loves you, you simply cannot take any interest in another woman. That is, if this certain party you speak of is as sensible and good a little woman as my wife. Say, do you know, I've got one out of a thousand—yes, one out of a million! I'm the luckiest man alive. I don't deserve it. When I think that she loves me—*me*, mind you—do you think I'd look at another woman? I couldn't. I couldn't! It would be dog mean!"

The baby stirred just then, and Alice missed what came next. He had lowered his voice. But this is what he said:

"You don't have to have this wild, passionate, story-book love. I think that's kind of kiddish. There never was any of it in my case. Just esteem, that's all. She was the only woman I ever met that didn't make me tired. She's company, if she doesn't say a word."

The baby was sound asleep.

"Oh, it's the only way to live," Rob went on.

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"Why, I'm as happy—as happy"—he searched for a comparison—"as happy as a hen in a flower bed. Hush! There she comes. Here, take this rocking chair, honey. Well, he fought against it as long as he could, didn't he, the little rascal!"

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THE DAYS OF HIS SEPARATION

JIMMY DARLING stood in his sock feet before his bureau, combing out his long red hair and braiding it for the night. As he braided, he noticed for the first time one or two threads of white. At such a time, if ever, a man casts up accounts with life, the earnest of that final accounting, plainly not so very far away.

He had come home that night, as he had come home any night since his sister married and moved to Kansas, to a dark and cheerless home. He had lighted the lamps and made the fires; had cooked and eaten his lone supper; had washed the dishes and tidied up. He was a neat housekeeper—for a man. To-morrow he would cook and eat his lone breakfast, do up his lunch, and go to work in the carriage factory. To-morrow and the next day and so on, as he had done yesterday and the day before and so on. And what was the good of it all?

It might have been very different with him. He thought how it would be if, when he clicked the gate latch, he might have seen the cheery lamps shining for him; if, when he trod the narrow brick walk by

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the side of the house, he might have seen through the window the white cloth gleaming and the glass and silver gayly twinkling at him; if, when he opened the back door, the warm and savory kitchen air gushed in his face; if some one had said, "Well, Jimmy," and put her mouth up to be kissed, and romping children had flung themselves against him. There is a fatherhood as well as a motherhood, and they tell me that a bachelor when he sees his first gray hair thinks of these things.

She who would say, "Well, Jimmy," was no vague abstraction of the feminine. Ever since he began to "take notice of 'em," she was Hetty Funk that was, now Mrs. Chris Hyams. Clairvoyantly Jimmy saw that no such welcome waited on Chris Hyams' homecoming, and that the children tremulously shadowed in the background until they knew whether pa was "all right." Poor Chris! Once a dashing sort of fellow, and a first-rate workman, he was now "his own worst enemy," if you know what that means.

All that the Bible says about the Nazarite, how he never tasted strong drink, and how, while his vow lasted, no hair of his head was shorn, was known by heart to Jimmy Darling. The sixth chapter of Numbers was worn and tattered to a brown flake. To-night as he beheld the threads of white in his thick red braids, he found himself repeating

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the words, "And this is the law of the Nazarite when the days of his separation are fulfilled. . . . When the days of his separation are fulfilled." Fulfilled? They never could be now as he dreamed they would. It was as if those white strands had been the filaments of electric lamps that shed light into a dark place. His vow that had been his stay so long against the smile of those to whom he had been pointed out as a "character" . . . Why, it was no vow at all!

In his youth when, like the rest of us, he sought a reconciliation of what is with what ought to be, he had lighted upon what seemed to him to be the Cause of All the Trouble. It was Whisky. Nothing could be a plainer duty than to abolish Whisky. And that could be done as soon as ever the decent men, who certainly outnumber all the vile and reckless, should vote to have it done. On a November day, range all the wolves on one side, range all the sheep on the other; give the word, "One. . . . Two. . . . Three. . . . Go!" and the sheep would butt the wolves to death. Ended the miserable past; begun the golden, happy future. It had seemed to him so sure a thing that he had made it up with old Jake Reinhart that, from that day and date, he, James M. Darling, party of the first part, would not cut his hair, or have it cut, until there was a Prohibition President of these United States; and to make it a

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fair bargain, for his part, he, Jacob S. Reinhart, party of the second part, covenanted and agreed not to cut his hair *after* there was a Prohibition President of these United States.

It was no solemn vow—only an election bet. He saw that now, and wondered he had not seen it sooner. It was no solemn vow, but his days had been "days of separation," without a doubt. He had been keeping company with Hetty Funk, but when he explained to her his vow, she mittened him in hot temper. She said she wasn't going to be made a mock of by nobody, and if he liked her as well as he said he did, he wouldn't think of such a fool caper. Why, the very idea! She didn't deny but what she liked him, but if he thought—if he thought she was going to marry a man that went around lookin' like a Taw-way Injun, with his hair a-flyin', why he was mighty much mistaken, that was all! She stood there a minute, burst into a loud fit of crying, and ran out and slammed the door behind her. There would be no Prohibition President of these United States. He knew that well. Year by year the vote was dwindling. Jake Reinhart was long dead, so that even if victory would come, it would bring no triumph. He might as well absolve himself of his vow—if it was a vow. But—it had gone so long now—and people would think it strange if— He smiled that he, of all men, should consider what "people thought."

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A faint shudder thrilled his spine. Standing there in his sock feet so long, he probably had taken cold. He must attend to it at once. It was the policy of his life never to neglect the beginnings of a cold. He went to the cupboard and took down a bottle of Dr. Hooker's Celebrated Chil-e-na.

Chil-e-na is one of the finest medicines ever put forth. It is good for almost every chronic ailment that almost everybody has. It is a sovereign remedy for catarrh, colds, consumption, and pneumonia. It cures dyspepsia in all its hideous forms. Also, rheumatism and neuralgia. It repairs the ravages of malaria, nervous prostration, and general debility. For "that sinking feeling" it is a positive specific. It tones up the system, and makes rich red blood. For sale at all druggists at one dollar a bottle. As it is better to be always well than to get sick and be cured again, it is earnestly advised that all should keep their systems toned up by regularly taking two tablespoonfuls of this invaluable remedy before each meal and upon retiring, also when feeling particularly exhausted, and to ward off colds. Many a time, on coming home from the carriage factory all tired out, Jimmy had taken a dose for "that sinking feeling," and it had toned up his system and made rich red blood right away. He could notice the difference immediately.

It had been in the *Enquirer* about his vow not to

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cut his hair until there was a Prohibition President, but Jimmy had not been much set up by this notoriety. He didn't think much of *The Cincinnati Enquirer* anyhow. But he felt right proud to know that his signed testimonial to the healing and preserving powers of Dr. Hooker's Celebrated Chil-e-na, accompanied by a large line-and-dot portrait of himself with his braids hung in front, nicely done up with ribbon bows, had been spread broadcast throughout the land, in the illustrious company of admirals, statesmen, the reverend clergy, and people who had lived to be a hundred and five years old. To have convinced one person of the merits of Chil-e-na was to have done some good in the world. The testimonial had convinced Jimmy at least; for thereafter he bought Chil-e-na by the case and kept it in the cellar.

As he replaced the bottle in the cupboard he heard a rap on his front door. Visitors were rare enough, but who could it be at this hour? He hoped not that Christian Science fellow come to tell about curing the cat of fits by reading to it out of a book, or Daniel the Second come to explain what Daniel the First meant by "a time, times, and a half time." What possessed crazy folks to come trailing after *him* so?

He tried to make out the features of the man standing timidly on the verge of the front porch.

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"Don't you recognize me?" asked the stranger, coming a little nearer. "I'm Chris. Th-n-n-n! Chris Hyams."

"Oh, how do you do?" said Jimmy with some embarrassment.

The man waited an awkward moment.

"Are—are you busy?"

"Why, no, I was just going to bed."

"I—er—could I come in an' set a while?"

"Why, certainly. Certainly. Walk in. Walk in." Jimmy blushed to think that he was forgetting how to act when company came.

Mr. Hyams entered, flickering his eyes at the light. He sat down on the edge of the first chair he saw. Coming inside seemed to satisfy him. He sat there and flickered his eyes in silence for some minutes. He needed a shave, had needed it for about a week. His hair was tousled, his linen was blackened at the edges, and his clothing had patches of dried mud upon it. At times he trembled so violently as to alarm Jimmy. He looked to be kind of run down in health, and as if his system needed toning up. That did not seem to be an auspicious opening for conversation though, and Jimmy had about decided to begin with, "To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" when Mr. Hyams announced:

"'Twa'n't no way to act."

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"What say?"

"Huh? Oh—er—I said it wa'n't no way to act. Lockin' up the house on me that way."

Jimmy wrinkled his brows at this cryptic statement. Locking him up?

"But you got out," he ventured.

"Huh?"

"I say you got out."

"I *was* out," said Hyams ruefully. "I couldn't git in."

He flickered his eyes for some minutes longer, and then proceeded.

"I went round to the back door, an' it was locked. So I tried the side door. It was locked. So I couldn't git in there. So I went round and rung the front door bell. Two, three times I rung it. Nob'dy come. So I tried to git in the pantry window, but they was a case knife stuck in so's it wouldn't hyste. I could of broke in the window, but I thought I better not. So I didn't. Would you?"

"No," replied the mystified Jimmy. He felt that it was safe to say that.

"No. Me neither. So I went to the suller door to git in that way. Suller door was padlocked. Yes, sir. It was padlocked! Never heard o' such a thing before. So—so I clomb up to where I could peek in at the window. Not the sign of a livin' soul about. Not a livin' soul!"

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He sighed, and stopped short as if he had finished.

"Er—whose house did you say this was?"

"Didn't appear to be nob'dy's," replied Mr. Hyams with an engaging smile.

"Looks o' things. So—so I went over to the old lady's. I knocked, an' she come to the door. 'Go on away from here,' she says to me, jist luck that. 'Go on away now.' An' I says, 'Hold on a second,' I says, 'I want to ast you somepin,' I says. 'Well, she ain't here,' she says, 'if that's what you're after,' she says. 'Well,' I says, 'I'm a-comin' in to see if she ain't,' I says. I wasn't goin' to let her bluff me that way. Aw, no! Aw, no! ''Deed you ain't,' she says, ''deed you ain't. You git right out of my yard,' she says. 'These is my premises,' she says, 'an' you git, right this instant,' she says. 'You dass to make a move to come into my house,' she says, 'without I ast you,' she says, 'an' I'll take an' mash your head in with the ax,' she says. 'You lazy, good-for-nothin', triflin', on'ry, drunken hound,' she says. An' I wasn't drunk at all. Jist as sober as what you see me right now."

"Who was this that you had this conversation with?" inquired Jimmy.

"Miz Funk."

"Oh, Mrs. Funk. Hetty's mother."

"Miz Mary Ann Funk said them very words to

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me. To *me*, mind you, her own lawful son-in-law, by jing! Aw, she talked to me meaner'n a dog."

"And what had you done?"

"Me? I hadn't done nothin'. Not one thing." He paused and reflected.

"*An'* I ain't likely to do much of anything now for quite a spell."

"How so?"

"Lost my job."

"Lost your job?"

"M'm. Got the sack. Went round this mornin'—*think* it was this mornin'—what day's to-day?"

"To-day? To-day's Friday."

"Friday! Aw, git out! Aw, quitch foolin'. 'Tain't Friday."

"Certainly it's Friday."

"Honest? Well, mebby 'tis. I kind o' lost track. Anyways, I went round. So—so Kearney, he seen me hanging up my hat, so he says to me, 'Nixy. Your services is no longer required,' he says. 'You're through,' he says. 'You got the bounce. Fly away, pretty bird!' Say! He's too fresh, that man is. I don't like to see a man too fresh. Specially a foreman. A foreman—a foreman had orta have more—more *dignity* about him than to go an' git fresh. 'Aw, go on,' I says, 'I gotta go to work an' earn a few pennies,' I says. 'Not here,' he says. 'Aw, now, Mike,' I says, 'I need the money,' I says. 'I

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ain't got a sou markee,' I told him. 'That don't interest me none,' he says. 'We don't want no more drunken bums around this shop,' he says, 'a-holdin' up a hurry job while they're off on a toot,' he says. 'We're all through with 'em,' he says. Aw, he talked to me meaner'n a dog. 'Well,' I says, 'give us the price till Saddy night,' I says. 'I'll give you a poke in the eye,' he says, 'if you don't walk out o' here,' he says. I was mad then. I was. I jist up an' told him what I thought of him. 'Looky here,' I says, 'you——'"

"You needn't repeat what you said to Kearney," interrupted Jimmy hastily.

"Well, all right. I give it to him strong an' plenty, you bet. So—so one word led to another, *an'* the first thing I knowed he ketched a holt of me an' throwed me downstairs. You know how steep them stairs is to the paint shop. Well, sir, he throwed me down 'em. I like to broke mun neck."

Jimmy hardly knew what to say. After a few more flickers of the eyes, Mr. Hyams resumed his tale.

"So from there I went over to Oesterle's. Was it Oesterle's or Ryan's? Well, anyway. So Oesterle, he ordered me out. So I went over to Ryan's. Yes, that's right. I went to Oesterle's first. Tom Haley was tendin' bar at Ryan's. Soon's he seen me, he sung out. 'Nix. No more here. Beat it.' So I went to Miller's. Same thing. I went all round. I even

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went to Slattery's. He gimme a shell o' beer and chased me."

This was familiar ground to Jimmy. In all the temperance stories it tells how the drunkard is made welcome so long as he has money in his pocket, but when he is stripped of everything——

"Well," interrupted Mr. Hyams, "I don't know's they *stripped* me exactly. I guess I got about all my clothes. I hain't missed nothin' yet. They gotta protect themselves. I don't blame *them*; I blame *her*."

"I don't understand."

"Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face. No offense, you understand. They was two weeks' pay comin' to me Saddy night. Are you right sure this is Friday? Well, sir, it don't seem possible! So—so I was goin' to pay the grocery bill an' a few other little things—me an' her had had words about that the last pay day—so I stopped in at Oesterle's to have a little somepin' first, an' they was quite a crowd around, an'— Th-n-n-n! the first thing I knowed I was layin' over by the brick yard, or mebby a hundred yards this side the brick yard, right flat on the ground. Yes, sir, right smack dab *on* the ground. An' not a sou markee in mup pocket. So I went round to the shop."

He checked off the items on his fingers.

"So I went round to all the s'loons. I told you that. So I went round to the house. I told you that.

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So I went to Miz Funk's. I told you that. So there I was. No place to go, not a sou markee in mup pocket, an' she's been all round an' told 'em not to let me have anything more, or she'll prosecute 'em. So, thinks I, 'What'm I goin' to do?' So I walked around, an' walked around. 'Shamed to go to any of muf *friends*, don't ye understand? So thinks I, 'There's Jimmy Darling. Him an' Het used to be pretty thick one time. She would 'a' took up with him if he hadn't commenced to wearin' his hair long.' So I seen the light. So I knocked on the door. So—" His voice dwindled into a feeble smile, which he turned on Jimmy.

"You want me to go to her and intercede for you?"

"W'y, yes, that might not be a bad idy. It's gittin' pretty late though, now. To-morrow will do as well."

"But do you think it would be right for her to take you back unless you reformed? Supposing you should go to drinking again."

"Me? Never. Not another drop passes my lips. Never touch it again the longest day I live. W'y, look what it's done for me. You know me, Jimmy. You know I'm a good hand. You know they ain't a neater, prettier striper in the State of Ohio than what I am when I'm at musself. You're a pretty good hand, Jimmy, but you ain't nothin' to me when I'm at

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musself. Ever see any of my imitation burl walnut? I'm a Hickey at burl walnut. An' Kearney throwed me out, ears over apple cart. Was it Kearney? No! It wasn't Kearney. 'Twas Rum. Rum done it, Jim. Here I am, on the hog, not a sou markee in mup pocket, no job, wife gone back on me, mother-in-law says she'll mash my head in with the ax, an' I need a shave the worst way, an' what done it? Rum done it. My pore wife! Jimmy, when I think o' what that pore woman has underwent for my sake, I could set right down an' cry, I could, for a fact, all jokes aside. I could set right down and cry. Nice woman, Jim. Bully woman in many respects. Darn shame you didn't git her. You would have, too, if it hadn't of be'n for your wearin' your hair long. I've heard her say so. She's got her good points, Jim, same as you an' me. But, Jimmy. Was it any way to act? Lockin' up the house on me that way? An' then for her to go round an' tell 'em not to let me have anything or she'll prosecute 'em. Entirely unnecessary. Utterly uncalled for. Because I've quit. You know that, Jim. You're my witness that I've quit. Lockin' up the house on me, an' not the scratch of a pen or a pencil. No note under the door mat to say where the key was. Nothin'. Because I looked, Jimmy. So help my God, I *looked* in under that door mat; if I looked once I looked twenty times. Not the scratch of a pen or pencil. Nothin'.

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An' me on the streets, Jim. Everybody gone back on me, all but Slattery, an' he gimme a bowl o' suds an' chased me. Friendless an' alone, an' needin' a shave! My God, it's awful!

> No one to love me, none to caress;
> No one to pity me, no one to bless.
> Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam—

See. What comes after that? Funny I can't think. Well, anyways,

> Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam,
> Tol-de-rol-idle-dum, 'out any home.

An' what done it? Rum done it, Jim. An' I'm done with Rum, henceforth an' f'revermore!"

"Brother Hyams, your hand upon it!"

Hyams looked into Jimmy's face with brimming eyes, and grasped his hand.

"But, my brother, you cannot get the victory in your own strength. Er—suppose we have a word of prayer."

There are some who presume to doubt if the old-time faith still lives among men. It does. When Jimmy Darling poured forth his fervent supplication for help for his brother sinner, he no more doubted that the Kind Father, the Maker and Governor of all things, both in heaven and earth, hushed the quiring angels that he might the better hearken, than he doubted that the tremulous, broken man be-

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side him heard the same petition. The tragedy of a great grief struggling to express itself in the drunkard's slangy babble Jimmy could faintly realize; perhaps it was as well he did not realize its comedy. It is not so much godless education that undermines belief as a too ticklish sense of humor.

When they had risen from their knees, Hyams was weeping. He shuddered horribly.

"There! There!" soothed Jimmy, laying his hand upon his penitent's arm. "You're all unstrung."

"I guess you're right. I am unstrung. But you know how it is, Ji—Brother Darling. When you hit it up as hard's I have, you feel mighty rocky afterwards. I ain't never going to touch another drop of the accursed stuff. D'ye understand? Not another drop. Well, mebby now an' ag'in— No! No! Not another drop, if it kills me. Only—if I jist had a little small hooker now to——"

"Hooker?"

"Yes, jist a little small hooker to tone me up——"

"Oh, Dr. Hooker's Celebrated Chil-e-na. The very thing! Why, yes. That ought to tone you up fine."

He rose and went toward the cupboard. Hyams' eyes followed him with an insane glitter.

"Let me see what it says. Hum-ah. 'For general debility——'"

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"Yes, yes."

"'Nervous prostration——'"

"Oh-oh-oh!"

"'That sinking feeling——'"

"Aw, Brother Darling! Give it to me! Aw, *please*! Aw, if you only knowed how I suffer! Aw, please, Brother Jimmy! Aw, *please*!"

He ran and fell on his knees, and clasped Jimmy by the legs, sobbing and pleading. "Aw, do! Aw, do give it to me!"

"'Dose, two tablespoonfuls to be taken before each meal, and——'"

Hyams broke down and cried like a child. It was something to drink, no matter what. Indeed, what had led him to go back to the paint shop had been the hope that he might get to steal a little shellac to quench his unnatural thirst.

"Aw, God bless you, Brother Darling!" For Jimmy was measuring out the dose. An instant longer and Hyams would have throttled him to get it. He grabbed the cup with shaking hands, and swallowed its contents with a gulp. "Nectar!" he whispered and gave a contradictory shudder. Then he looked up at Jimmy with a quizzical air. A slow wink crept out, but finding no encouragement in Jimmy's innocent face, stole shyly back, and was as if it had not been.

"Feel any better?"

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"Oh, a heap. A heap. Say! That's great stuff."

"I think so," answered the unsuspecting Mr. Darling. "I find it beneficial. I take it regularly three times a day."

"You do, eh?"

"Yes, and when I'm exhausted and all played out it does me a wonderful sight of good. I don't know how I'd get along without it."

"Yes, I can understand that."

"I'm satisfied it's saved me from many a hard spell of sickness. I buy it by the case and keep it in the cellar."

"In the cellar, eh?"

"It's a vegetable compound——"

"Oh, sure."

"Composed of roots and herbs, discovered by Isaiah Hooker, D.D., M.D. He's a returned medical missionary, you know. It says here: 'Prepared in a suitable vehicle.' Now that always puzzled me. I always thought a vehicle was a wagon or a carriage."

"Perfectly correct use of the word, Brother Darling. It went down my throat like it was on wheels." This time the wink came boldly forth. Jimmy paid no heed. When a man's nerves are all unstrung, it doesn't do to take notice of every little thing.

"You think it did you good?"

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"I know it did. One more would fix me so's I could get a good night's rest. Pour me out another little hooker, won't you, Brother Darling?"

"Well, I don't know. It's a powerful medicine, you understand, and I'm no doctor."

"Why, Brother Darling," explained Hyams. "You don't suppose a saved man like Brother Hooker would put out a medicine that was rank poison, do you? Why, certainly not. Certainly not."

The second dose was even more beneficial than the first, and Jimmy returned the bottle to its place with an easy mind, and showed Brother Hyams where he was to sleep.

. . . . . .

Solitary living is likely to be plain, not to say skimpy living, and on his way home from the carriage factory the next evening, Jimmy stopped in at the butcher's and the grocer's. If Brother Hyams was to be made a useful member of society once more, his system must be built up by nourishing food as well as a regular course of Chil-e-na. Mingled with the joy over one sinner that repenteth was the anticipation of having somebody to welcome him with lighted lamps, the fires going, and the tea-kettle on.

As he neared his corner, quite appropriately he heard the tune of "Throw Out the Life Line." Could it be possible? It was even so. Brother Hyams

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was singing that gospel hymn, rather too boisterously, rather too slowly, not quite in tune, but singing, "Throw Out the Life Line." Whose was that other jarring voice?

There were people gathered about his gate. Was anything wrong? He heard some one say, "Here's Mr. Darling now."

"Well, I think it's about *time*!" he heard the voice of Mrs. Pritchard scold.

"The lives scared plumb out of us. It's just *perfectly awful*! I would of went in myself, only I have such a time with my heart, and thinks I——"

Jimmy flung open the sitting-room door.

"Cheese it! Cheese it!" a voice muttered in the gloom.

"'Some one is sinking tooooo-dayeeeee.' For that sinking feeling take Dr. Hook— Why, hello, Jimmy, old boy! How are you? What's the best word?" Thus Mr. Hyams, as his eyes flickered at Jimmy's flaring match. The other man got up awkwardly as Jimmy lighted the lamp. Frowzy old Very Dirty Smith stood revealed, rightly nicknamed.

"Why, what are *you* doing in my house?"

"That's all right, Ji—Brother Darling, I should say. Friend o' mine. Shake hands with Brother Smith, Brother Darling. Singing and making melody in our hearts, Brother Darling, singing and making mel— 'Twas this way. I got kind o' lone-

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some. So I seen Brother Smith a-goin' past. So I hollered at him. So——"

"You're intoxicated."

"Who? Me? Why, Brother Darling, how you talk!"

"Bringing liquor into *my* house——"

"Who brought liquor into your house? Not me. Brother Smith, did you bring liquor into this gentleman's house? Says *he* didn't bring no liquor in."

"After your solemn promise last night never to touch another drop——"

"Yes, I said that. I meant it too!" cried Hyams with tense and sudden earnestness. "An' who set me a-goin' ag'in? Hay? Who put it to my lips? Hay? Who was it?"

"Cheese it! Cheese it!" huskily counseled Very Dirty Smith out of one corner of his mouth, as Hyams thrust his chin almost in Jimmy's face, who drew back stammering. "Why—why——"

"*You*!—you hypocrite! You did. Where'd I git my liquor? Out o' your cellar. In the case over by the puttaters. That's where I got it. Where you keep it so's you can soak it all by yourself. You ain't got the manhood to stand up to the bar, like a ge'l'man should. You gotta sneak it."

"I never had a drop of liquor in my house!" cried Jimmy hotly. "I do not know what liquor tastes like."

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"Oh, you don't, hay? You don't, hay? Well, anybody asts you what liquor tastes like, you tell 'em it tastes like Dr. Hooker's Celebrated Chil-e-na, on'y more so."

The room gave a sudden dip and swung dizzily. Jimmy caught a chair back to steady himself.

"You want to know where I got mul load?"

For answer, Hyams made a gesture toward the table, where stood some dozen bottles once full of the great vegetable compound, now empty.

"You drank all that!" gasped Jimmy.

"Me an' Brother Smith here, between us."

"Why, it will kill you! It's a powerful drug!"

"You kin git it in any s'loon twicet as powerful for half the money. Dollar a bottle! Gee! They soaked you for fair. Th-n-n-n!" snickered Hyams. Then he rolled up his eyes, and began to mimic Jimmy. "'Help our dear brother to overcome this terrible temptation,' says you, *an'* the very first crack out of the box you hand me out a snifter of the oh-be-joyful. You're a Hickey. You are, for a fact."

"I didn't know—I didn't dream——"

"Come off! COME OFF!"

Hyams leered at Jimmy, but something in those honest eyes made him shrug his shoulders and say: "In that case, Dr. Hooker *is* the 'greatest discoverer of the age.' 'Why so?' says you. Well, I tell you. He discovered a way so's a prohibitionist can

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git his toddy regular, an' nobody find it out, *not even himself*! Well, now that you know, suppose you join me an' muf friend here in a social glass to the health of Isaiah Hooker, D.D. and M.D., the greatest discoverer of the age." He leaned over and lifted a bottle that was still nearly half full.

"No!" cried Jimmy, fiercely striking the flask, and sending it hurtling across the room, where it gurgled itself empty.

"Ah! What did you go an' do that for?" snarled Hyams. "That's the last they is in the house!"

"That's the last there ever will be in this house!"

"M-hm. *M*-hm. I hear you say so. I've said the same thing musself, many's the time. Mebby you'll find it ain't so easy to quit it after all these years of steady soakin'. Mebby you'll find you're jist like me, and Brother Smith here, an' a lot more round town we know. You gotta have it. If it ain't Rum open an' above board, it's patent medicine, or morphine, or some other kind of dope for that 'sinkin' feelin'.' Some folks don't need it. Others has to have it, one way or another, the folks that ain't quite right, the no-goods, the botch jobs of men, like you an' me, an' Brother Very Dirty Smith here."

Jimmy's flesh crawled at the thought of such companionship.

"You folks thinks you're a whole lot, don't ye?" sneered Hyams. "You think you're smarter'n God-

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dlemighty. You'll show Him how to do. A-ah! *You* can't learn Him nothin'. He knows His little book. Don't you reckon I know Rum's makin' a mock o' me? It's made me lose my job; it's lost me the love of my wife, an' made my young ones so's they're afraid o' me. An' I can't quit it. Why not? Why can't I? He won't let me! He's got it in for me!" He shook his fist at heaven and cursed his Maker.

Jimmy drew in a horror-stricken breath. Smith fidgeted.

"He's got it in for me. He wants to kill me, an' He wants to fix it so's no girl but a fool girl that He wants to kill too will ever marry a drunkard. He's got it in for you too, Jimmy Darling, let me tell you that."

"Come on, Chris," muttered Smith. "We better be movin'."

"In a minute. Be right *with* you. I wonder where I left my hat at. Summers round here. Oh, here it is. Yes, sir. He's got it in for you too. He don't want none o' your get. You're cracked, that's what you are. An' He knows it. An' when He seen 'at you an' Het was goin' together, He took an' put it in your head for to let your hair grow long. She wouldn't have you. No other girl would have you. He fixed *you* all right. All the no-goods He gives the notion that they're different. That's His way of fixin' *them*. What He wants is folks that's like other people. An'

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we ain't. You, an' me, an' Brother Very Dirty Smith."

The clock ticked loudly.

"Well," he said, and crammed his hat upon his head, and started for the door. With the handle in his hand, he turned. "Brother Darling, I'm obliged to you for your kind hospitality, but seein's the liquor has kind o' gin out, why——"

"Where are you going?" cried Jimmy, remembering that the man was homeless, penniless, and without work.

"To hell! Where else?"

He slammed the door behind him. Jimmy heard the two shuffle down the walk and out the gate. He stood dazed. The whole fabric of his life had been dissolved in ruins.

He a Nazarite? For years he had been tippling steadily. That he had not known that he was tippling might excuse his guilt; it could not ablate the fact. It could not loose him from the habit. A low moan crowded its way through his clinched teeth. No! He could not yield to it though every pang that flesh could know should torture him. And yet, what harm had it done him? He had said it did him good, had proclaimed it to the world. Like enough that testimonial of his was even now making secret drunkards. He would warn the people. But who would publish the warning?

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At any rate he would no longer bear the mark of those whom God would destroy, and in whose veins He injects the germs of sterility; eccentrics, trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit. He would no longer wear the badge of the barren fig tree cumbering the ground. His braids seared his scalp, as if each hair had been a white-hot wire. He tore them down, and as the shears crunched through them, a wild elation filled his soul.

It was done now! It could not be undone.

He stepped about in getting his supper as if his feet were as light as his head felt. He whistled and hummed an air he had not thought of in many a long year, "Villikins and his Dinah." He used to sing that when he was courting Hetty. Supposing—just supposing—she should get a divorce from Chris, and . . . ah, then he might see the lamps lighted against his coming home. The tablecloth would gleam at him through the window as he came along the narrow walk by the side of the house; the warm and savory air would gush forth upon him as he opened the back door. She—she would come to kiss him, and say, "Well, Jimmy," and romping children would fling themselves upon him, hers now, his very own later. It was not too late. He was a young man yet.

For a moment, that sadness which we all feel in parting from the past, even the terrible past, came

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over him. He went to get a newspaper wherein to wrap up the thick braids of hair and put them away for a keepsake. But the words came forth from the chambers of his memory. "And he shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings." He lifted the stove lid and crammed the sizzling braids in upon the coals.

Poking the frying steak with a fork in one hand, he put the other up to feel of the jagged locks the shears had left. He chuckled to think how he must look.

"Guess I'll have to take in the barber shop to-night," he said to himself, "just like other people." It pleased him, so he said it again. "Just like other people." And took up the gay tune:

Tooma-tooral-i-ooral, i-ooral-ullay,
Tooma-tooral-i-ooral, i-ooral-ullay,
Tooma-tooral-i-oo—

Whoa, there, coffeepot! Want to put the fire out, boiling over that way?

-ral, i-ooral-ullay,
Tooma-tooral-i-ooral, i-ooral-ullay.

The days of his separation were ended.

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THAT ABOUT LAURA HORNBAKER

MRS. HORNBAKER looked out of her window and called to her daughter: "Laury, there's Dr. Avery. Run out and ask him how Mrs. Moots is. Don't go bareheaded. You are the foolishest child. Here, take my old broché shawl."

After a little, Mrs. Hornbaker went quietly into the front room and curled the edge of the window shade just enough to let her see Laura still talking to the young man in the buggy. He was carrying on a lively conversation. Every time the little brown mare that hated to stand still in the cold would start to go, he would stop her. Laura had her shawl pulled tight over her head, her shoulders hunched up, and her hands tucked into her armpits. She swayed her weight from one foot to the other. It was cold in the parlor and once or twice Mrs. Hornbaker started for the warm sitting room, but it was only the little brown mare that was minded to end the conversation. Finally the doctor seemed to come to his senses and note that Laura was shivering. He ordered her into the house and drove off, looking

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back until he got around the corner of Chillicothe Street. Laura ran up the front walk with a fine pretense of not watching anybody from the angle of her eye, but she knew as well as Dr. Avery when Lear's house came between her and the buggy.

Mrs. Hornbaker seemed not to have stirred, but Laura knew well enough that her mother had been watching, and her mother knew that she knew. Both played out their little comedy. Laura spread her hands to the stove and shuddered "Wooh!" before she took off her shawl and threw it on the machine. Then, as she drew a chair up to the stove to warm her feet, Mrs. Hornbaker hitched her rocking chair over, too, merely to be near her while she talked.

"He says Abel Horn's going to play the hero in 'The Drummer Boy of Shiloh.'"

"The which?"

"Why, that war play the Company K boys are getting up. He's to be Lide Burkhart's lover."

"Huh!" sneered the mother. "He won't have to practice up much. How long's he be'n goin' with her now? The idy o' him playin' hero! He'll play Whaley. The little runt! I s'pose he'll wear a wig to cover up his baldness."

"Oh, well, he's Abel Horn, you know," said Laura philosophically. "It is his nature to. You might know he'd jam in to be first and foremost in

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everything. I believe in my soul he'd ask Gabriel on the Resurrection Morning to lend him his trumpet to blow on a while."

"Laura!"

"He would. And he'd get it, too. I don't know what possesses the men to let him ride over 'em the way he does unless it is that they are all as gone gumps as he is."

"How'd the doctor say Mrs. Moots was?"

"Why, he said she might live through the night."

"Mercy! Why, the poor thing!"

"Oh, I don't know!" answered the unfeeling Laura, "as they's any call to pity her. She's going where there'll be no Amzi Moots. I should think she'd say, 'Welcome death!' after living with that old skinflint for eleven years."

"Now, Laury, you oughtn't to talk that way about your neighbors."

"Well, ma, you know as well as I do that he's the meanest man in Logan County. Dr. Avery says that if he had been called sooner he might have saved her, but he says she don't seem to have any vitality. I told him she hadn't had enough to eat for eleven years, and what could he expect? He says that Moots tried to get him to agree that the whole thing, medicines and all, shouldn't come to more than fifteen dollars."

"Why, Laura Hornbaker!"

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"Ain't he the stingiest? Laws! I wouldn't marry Amzi Moots if he was the last man on earth!"

"You like Dr. Avery pretty well, don't you?"

Laura could not have heard her, for she went right on: "Moots won't even hire anybody to cook the victuals or help wait on her and look after Luella. The doctor says the house just looks like distraction. Mrs. Lucius Lybrand was in yesterday a while, he says. He wanted Moots to hire a trained nurse, but he says the man looked like he was death-smit at the idea of spending so much money."

"What else was you and the doctor talking about so long?"

"Oh, he was telling me about his practice."

"I guess he hain't got much of a one."

"He says he'd do right well if people was to pay him what they owed. He says he'd be all out of debt and have consid'able over. You know he borrowed money to study on up to Cleveland. He says there's more'n three hundred dollars of his outstanding. He says it seems like people wait till the last day in the afternoon to pay the doctor."

"Your pa says it's awful hard to get folks to settle up their grocery bills, too," sighed Mrs. Hornbaker, who came to this topic with the vivid interest one has in a chronic ailment. "I declare I don't know what we're going to do. I don't see how your pa can pay off that mortgage on the house. Your pa

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was very good about it. He didn't urge me any. . . . I did say that come what might, let go what must, I'd never put a mortgage on the house after I bought it with that $3,400 that pap willed me. . . . But when he was so pushed for money, and it looked as if the grocery would have to go up, I just kind of had to let him borrow that $2,200 and give the mortgage as security. . . . Your pa was very good about it, though. . . . And now it's as much as he can do to meet the interest. . . . And if they was to foreclose, I don't know what on earth we'd do. . . . And there's that note of Rosenthal's, that'll be comin' due before long——"

"Well, I just get real provoked at pa sometimes," burst in Laura. "He won't let me do anything and——"

"You mustn't talk that way about your pa," reproved Mrs. Hornbaker. "You know he don't believe in girls workin' out. Yes, yes, I know it ain't the same as goin' into somebody else's kitchen, but he thinks it is. And I don't know what I'd do without you, now that I'm so poorly. We'd have to keep a girl, and her board and wages'd come to more'n what you could make. And laws! I don't want any of 'em round under foot. Lazy, triflin' things!"

"It ain't that, ma," persisted Laura. "It's his not applying for a pension when he might just as well's not."

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"Well, Laury, you know how he is about that. You know he says as long as he's able to work he ain't goin' to live off o' charity."

"Tchk!" clicked Laura in despair. "I do think a man is the biggest f-double-o-l. Every last one of them has got some cranky notion or other in his head. Why, looky here. Old man Frizzell, the president of the National Bank, that never had a day's sickness in his life, and never went a step nearer to the war than Camp Chase, drafted at that, and just wallerin' in money—drawin' a pension just the same. And here's pa, that fought all through—I declare I just get heartsick sometimes when I see him down at the store working so hard, getting up them barrels of sugar——"

"Now, I told him to let Rote do that," interrupted her mother.

"Yes. Well. You get Eurotus Smith to do any hard work if you can. He's another one of your *men*. Laziest mortal that ever drew the breath of life! I'm just going to take charge of this pension business myself. I'm going down to see Mr. Lovejoy about it to-morrow morning, and when it comes to having pa examined, I'm going to get Dr. Avery to do it and just keep at pa till he gives in."

"I don't know; your pa is very firm."

"You mean, he can be mulish like all the men when you corner 'em, and they know they're wrong

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and won't give in. I'll get around him all right. You see if I don't."

"I s'pose you think your Dr. Avery is jist perfection," sniffed Mrs. Hornbaker.

"Oh, hush up about Dr. Avery. He's as big a fool as the rest of them, if all was known." Yet in her heart—but who knows what's in a woman's heart?

There was a silence, and then Mrs. Hornbaker, who from thinking of Dr. Avery had gone on to thinking of Lucy Moots, said: "I reckon we'd ought to go over there after we get the supper dishes washed up."

"Why, what are you talking about?" demanded Laura, sharply turning on her mother. "We don't know his people at all."

"Why, what are *you* talking about?" retorted her mother. "I've knowed Lucy Edwards ever since she was a little girl."

"Oh," said Laura. "All right."

Laura Hornbaker and her mother were so close akin mentally that often after a long silence one would say something which was just what the other was thinking of. But it wasn't so this time.

II

Two months after Mrs. Moots' funeral, Minuca Center was still talking about the way Almeda Ed-

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wards, who married Jim Hetherington after she couldn't get Amzi Moots, was acting. Word had been sent to her at six in the morning that she must come right away if she wanted to see her sister alive. She got to the house at half past ten; she said she didn't get her housework done before. She was so sorry she had not seen Lucy alive, and wanted to know if she was resigned to go, and if she had said anything about that cameo pin that used to belong to their mother. (Everybody said *she* was the one that ought to have got Moots; then there would have been a pair of them.) Moots wanted her to take little Luella to raise, but when she found out that Lucy hadn't left her the cameo pin, she wouldn't. So Moots got an old woman from the county house to look after the child and take care of the house. All she cost him was her board and keep. She was what they called, " kind of be-addled," harmless enough, though when anybody knocked at the door she would always grab up the poker and greet the visitor with, " You let me alone and I'll let you alone."

It made Laura feel so sorry for poor little Luella that she had the child come over to her house when there was no school. Luella had never had a doll, and when Laura gave her the one she had kept from her own girlhood days Mrs. Hornbaker cried to see the look that came into the little thing's eyes as she took it into her arms and went to play " keep house "

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out in the grape arbor with a few broken pieces of crockery.

Mr. Moots always came after her and asked every time, "Has she been a bother to you?" and Laura always told him she was more of a comfort than a bother, for a quieter and more affectionate child never lived than Luella Moots. She would twine her arms around Laura's neck and say, "I love you jist 'e same as if you was my own ma. I woosht you was my own ma, don't you? Oh, looky, Aunty Hornbaker! How red Wally's gettin' 'round her neck! Yes, and on her face, too. What makes you get so red, Wally?"

People talked about it, and that made Laura and her mother feel a little uneasy, but what could they do? They couldn't tell Luella she mustn't come any more, could they? It would break her heart, and besides, they liked to have her. Mr. Hornbaker almost always had a stick of candy in his pocket for her, and would hold her by the hour and tell her stories about a little curly dog named Pino he had when he was a little boy. If Luella came, then her father would have to call for her. Mrs. Hornbaker simply *would not* have old Jane Ann about the place. Once she came, and when Mrs. Hornbaker went to the back door, old Jane Ann grabbed up the hatchet they chopped kindlings with and muttered, "You let me alone and I'll let you alone. I come for

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Luella." Mrs. Hornbaker didn't get over it all that evening, but shook like she had a hard chill. So Amzi Moots had to call for Luella, and folks might talk if it did them any good.

One day Mr. Hornbaker came home to dinner with, "Who do you s'pose I seen a-prancin' down Main Street, as large as life, all diked out in a new suit and a plug hat and a red necktie, steppin' as high as a blind horse?"

"Laws, I do' know," said his wife. "Who?"

"Amzi Moots!"

"Good land! Oh, pa, you're foolin'!" doubted Mrs. Hornbaker.

"Amzi Moots, I tell you. Head up and tail over the dashboard. He's beginnin' to take notice."

"He better let his poor wife get good and cold first," observed Laura, somewhat sourly.

"I kind o' mistrust he has his eye on you, Wally," teased Mr. Hornbaker, using the nickname little Luella had given her.

"Huh! He better not."

"Well, now, Laura, if he was to come a-castin' sheep's eyes at you——"

"Quit now!"

"And tellin' you how much he loved you, and would you take the place of his dear companion——"

"*Quee-yut, pa!*"

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"And be a mother to little Luella and for you to not pay no attention to that young whiffet of a Doc Avery——"

"QUEE-YUT-TA! Ma, can't you make him stop?"

"Better to be an old man's darling than a young man's sla—" In the playful scuffle that followed Mr. Hornbaker got a crumb crosswise and began coughing so hard that they all sobered down in a moment, fearful that his old wound might break out. Dr. Avery had told mother and daughter, after the examination, that Mr. Hornbaker would have to be very careful of himself.

"O dear me!" he sighed, after he had got his breath back, "if they don't hurry up with that there pension o' yours, Laura, I'm afraid your poor old pappy won't get much good of it."

"I don't think you ought to tease me about old Moots that way."

"He's not old, Laura," corrected her mother. "He told me he had all his own teeth, and he's not a day over fifty-three. I'm sure you might do worse'n to marry a steady man like Mr. Moots. Well off he is, too."

"M-yes," admitted her father. "Means to stay so, too."

"And little Luella just loves the ground you walk on," persisted her mother.

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"Good land, ma! Do you think I'd marry that old coot?"

"Tut-tut, Laura! What kind of talk is that about your neighbors? It ain't pretty a bit. If he comes to see you, I want you to treat him like a lady."

"He's no lady; he ain't hardly a——"

"You know what I mean. Now I want you to behave yourself."

That very evening who should appear but Mr. Moots in all the splendor described by Mr. Hornbaker, leading little Luella by the hand and inquiring if Miss Hornbaker would not be pleased to step down to Plotner's with them and partake of some ice cream? Mr. Hornbaker's jaw dropped, and his nose glasses fell off, but Mrs. Hornbaker was as cool as a cucumber and made answer: "Why, yes. Laury, go get your things on," before that young woman could say aye, yes, or no. She gave one rebellious look at her mother and then consented for the sake of little Luella.

Mr. Hornbaker waited till he heard the gate latch click behind them, and then he said, "Well, if that don't beat the Dutch!"

"I don't see anything strange in Laury's being asked out," replied Mrs. Hornbaker primly.

"Why, of course not, but Amzi Moots buyin' ice cream! G for jerks! And yit they talk about the age o' miracles a-bein' past!"

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Laura met Dr. Avery just outside Plotner's, and, as she told her mother afterwards, she thought she would sink through the sidewalk. Her mother said she didn't see why. Dr. Avery was abashed, too; it hadn't occurred to him that Moots might be in the running. He hadn't recovered his self-respect when he went into Josh Riddle's a little later to buy a cigar. Josh said: "Aha! I see old Moots is cuttin' you out, Doc."

"Cuttin' me out with who?" Dr. Avery asked, with apparent indifference.

"Why, Laura Hornbaker. I seen Moots takin' her and his little girl into Plotner's a while ago to treat 'em to ice cream. I reckon they had one dish an' three spoons."

The physician said, "Huh!" and walked out with much dignity. He did not choose to continue the conversation. Josh winked at the two Longenecker boys, who had stopped playing the mandolin when Josh went behind the counter. It was all over Minuca Center the next day about Moots cutting Doc Avery out. Emerson may be correct about all the world loving the lover, but at the Center it was the best "rig" you could get on a fellow to find out that he was in love.

Mr. Moots, having made a beginning, saw no need of making an ending just yet. He took her to "East Lynne" and the Mrs. H. M. Smith concert

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company. He told her he thought she sang full as well as Mrs. Smith. Laura had taken three terms of Professor Minetti, and was the only paid member of Center Street M. E. choir. She got $50 a year, and a dollar for every funeral. Mr. Moots appreciated good music. Almost his only weakness was for "The Bluebells of Scotland." Once he cried when she sang it. It put him so in mind of his mother. It was such a favorite of hers. To tell the truth, the worst thing about Moots was his appalling stinginess, and he seemed to have laid that aside as one puts off a garment. When Dr. Avery tried to outstay him, it was always Mr. Moots that asked if the doctor would not favor the company with a little music. He told Laura he thought the doctor had a right nice tenor voice, light, of course, but, my! how sweet! Sometimes you'd think it was a lady singing. Mr. Moots sang bass himself.

He was not obtrusive in his courtship, only persistent. He was thoroughly dependable. From being resigned to his coming, Laura grew to expect it and to look forward to a day when a question should be asked of her by him.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she asked of her mother.

"Why, Laury, child," her mother answered, "I don't see as there's any call for *you* to do anything. Has *he* said anything yet?"

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"Well, no; nothing in particular. He kind o' hints about getting his house repainted and papered, and what color had he better have it, and how lonesome it is for Luella with nobody to take care of her but old Jane Ann, and how fond Luella is of me and— and all like that."

"Nothin' more'n hintin', I s'pose?"

"No, but it's pretty plain hinting."

"He's never asked you right out if you'd be a mother to Luella, has he?"

"Not right out."

"Guess you better wait till he does. Doctor said anything?"

"No'm; nothing in particular. He kind o' hints, too. Says how lonesome he is."

"Why, he's got a mother and a sister."

"Yes; but he says that's different."

"Does, eh? Ain't asked you if you'd be his companion? No; I s'pose not."

"Not yet." There was a long silence. "He says collections are so bad."

This was like speaking of indigestion to a dyspeptic. "Laws! I don't know what will become of us. There's that mortgage and that note of Rosenthal's, the wholesale man. Mr. Lovejoy say why the pension didn't come?"

"He says there is always more or less delay about such things. So much red tape, he says."

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"Don't you like Mr. Moots?"

"Oh, yes, kind o'."

"Your pa says he guesses Dr. Avery was pretty gay when he was up to Cleveland studying medicine."

A long pause.

"Well, ma, I tell you what. If I marry that old skeezicks, I'm going to have ten dollars a week to run the house on. That's got to be in black and white. Now. He ain't going to starve *me* to death."

Though she knew the question was coming, when it did come, she was speechless. At four-and-twenty it is hard to let the head rule the heart. Maybe, after all, the heart has the more wisdom at that age. Mr. Moots was very nice about it. He said she might want to think it over. As she still sat silent, he went on to tell her that he had happened into the bank the other day and had learned about the mortgage. While he knew that nothing could make up for the loss of such a daughter—though it wouldn't be losing her, because she would be only four squares away from them—still, it would be a comfort to her pa and ma to know that their home was safe and that their daughter had saved it for them. And then, as a man who has looked too long over a precipice casts himself headlong, she said "Yes," and he kissed her.

After he had gone she said to her mother: "I hope

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you're satisfied now," and ran up to her room. Her mother followed and found her crying. She stroked the girl's hair and tried to tell her how well she had done; the doctor hadn't asked her, anyway. Maybe he hadn't meant to; from all she could learn he was pretty wild, and Mr. Moots was a good, steady man, and——

"Oh, hush up!" snapped Laura. "You don't think I'm going to back out of it now. I want to be alone."

"What's the matter with Wally?" asked Mr. Hornbaker when his wife came downstairs.

"Mr. Moots has asked her and she told him 'Yes.' She's kind of unstrung, I guess."

Mr. Hornbaker looked troubled. "I thought her and the doctor was all so thick."

"Oh, the doctor! I guess she'd find when it come to payin' the meat man the doctor wouldn't be much account. He's head over heels in debt now, and his mother and sister to keep. Love's a nice thing in the story books, but what's wanted is a good provider."

"Amzi Moots ain't noways celebrated for bein' that," Mr. Hornbaker observed.

"He'll find Laura's no Lucy Edwards, weak as water. She'll spunk up to him. She can manage him. I don't think much o' young doctors anyways. They know too much about people's insides, and I don't

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think it's very nice. Rob graves and cut folks up is all they like to do. Then George never goes to church. And you said yourself he was pretty gay when he was up to Cleveland."

"Oh, get out! I didn't, either. No more'n what any fellow is. They ain't a speck of onriness in George Avery. Why look how nice he is to his mother and his sister, and how hard he has worked to get himself ahead. Why, he was the honor man of his class, and he's the best doctor in Minuca Center, young as he is. Why, he's the pick o' the town."

"Huh!" doubted Mrs. Hornbaker. "Mr. Moots has bought the mortgage and is going to give it to Laury for a wedding present."

Mr. Hornbaker was dumb.

The next evening after that, Laura came in from the side porch all excited. "Mother!" she gasped. "There's George in the buggy, and I do believe he's coming to take me out riding!"

"Well, honey," said her mother placidly, "you'll just have to ask him to excuse you."

"But what'll I tell him if he asks me why not?"

"Why, tell him you're engaged to be married to Mr. Moots."

"O mother! I can't, I can't."

"Well, Laury, you'll have to. It's so, and it'll have to be known some time. Might as well be now as

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any other time. Tell him—now, don't get to cryin' and go in there with your eyes as red as Pharaoh's."

Being in the sitting room, which was next to the parlor, Mrs. Hornbaker could not help hearing Dr. Avery when he got to talking loud and excited.

"You sold yourself! You sold yourself! That's what you did!" he cried. "Oh, you are just like the rest of them. Lead a fellow on to think they're angels out of heaven and then sell out to the highest bidder. And I was going to ask you to be— Do you know what you are? I know. I know what you are. You're just as bad as Liz Donheimer. That's all she——"

Mrs. Hornbaker flung the door open. "You get!" she menaced. "You get right out of that door! Right now! You dare to talk to my daughter that way! You dare! Compare her to such a creature! If you ever open your head to speak to Laura again, I'll have your horsewhipped. Don't you talk to me! You—" She was so choked with rage she could say no more, but advanced toward him, her forefinger like a pistol. He backed out of the house and down the front walk. Two or three people passing stopped to listen and to look. "You ever speak to her again, and I'll have you horsewhipped!" she shouted as the humbled physician drove off.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Hornbaker? What did he do?" asked Josh Riddle.

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"Oh, go on about your business!" she snapped and went into the house.

"Now you see," she said to Laura, "now you see what kind of a man your doctor is. Don't you mind saying to me that he was as big a fool as the rest, if all was known? Well, now you know."

"But it's so, mother," sobbed Laura. "I—I am what he said I was."

"O Laura, Laura, you're enough to try the patience of a saint."

III

That winter the Company K boys got up the cantata of "Esther, the Beautiful Queen." It was notable for many things, not the least being that for once there was something going on that Abel Horn was not head man in. *Mordecai*, the leading part, is written for a tenor, and Abel sang bass. He finally consented to play *Haman*, with the stipulation that he might introduce "The Heart Bowed Down." Charley Pope, who got the whole thing up and played the piano, said, "All right." The first night —they gave it two nights to crowded houses, because it was scriptural—the first night, Abel cleared his throat, swelled out his chest, and took the center of the stage, but Charley Pope never let on. He went right ahead with the music cue for something else, and the others had to go on and Abel was

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crowded back. He glared at Charley all the time he was on, but Charley never saw him. He waited for Charley after the curtain came down, but that act Charley did not go back. He sat on the piano stool, chewing his jaws and occasionally smiling a very dry smile. Everybody else in Melodeon Hall saw Abel pull the curtain back and beckon to Charley. Everybody else wondered what for. After the performance he declared to Abel that he had mislaid the music for the introduced number.

"Aw, well, now, looky here," said Abel, "that's too thin. You've played that for me too many times to need the notes. Anyhow, it's a simple thing, just tum-ty-tum, TUM-ty-tum, tum-ty-tum, TUM-ty-tum."

"That's all right," Charley told him. "I ain't takin' no chances in a reg'lar opera. I got to have the score before me."

"Well, I'll see 'at you have it to-morrow night. I'll look out for that. It won't do to disappoint the pub——"

"All right," said Charley, and clapped his hands. "Ladies, attention, please! Miss Harmount, will you —to-morrow night— Attention, please. To-morrow night, won't you all please remember where it goes, 'la-lull-la-lee,' that the altos have A flat against the sopranos' B flat? Some of you to-night—I wish you'd go over it now. No, it's 'la-lull-la-lee.' Once

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again. That's all right. Remember that to-morrow night. Oh, fine! Went fine! Yes, yes, Abel, run along now. I heard you."

The next night Abel cleared his throat, swelled his chest, took the center of the stage, and—Charley Pope went right on. The people wondered what made all the Persians snicker so. Even the heart-broken Jews were on the broad grin. Abel glared savagely at the musical director. After the performance he wanted to argue with Charley, who brusquely said, "Aw, go to grass! Where's Josh Riddle? Say, Josh, tell me that about Laura Hornbaker."

The Company K boys had asked Laura to play *Esther* because she looked the part and had such a lovely voice. They had wanted Dr. Avery to be *Mordecai*, but knowing what had happened, were obliged to take Frank Hutsinpillar, who was even more stupid than the run of tenors, if such a thing can be. Even the indefatigable Charley Pope could not hammer the music into his head, and as an actor he promised to be awful. Just the week before the production he got mad about something and backed out. It looked as if the whole thing would have to be given up unless it could be arranged for Dr. Avery to sing the part. Charley Pope had gone over it with him, and was sure he could do it if— The committee wanted Josh Riddle to negotiate the

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transaction, but remembering how he had been told to go on about his business, he enthusiastically declined. Then they put the job off on Charley Pope. He assumed such a plunged-in-a-gulf-of-dark-despair expression that Mrs. Hornbaker felt sorry for the poor man, and consented to let Laura sing with Dr. Avery after Charley had shown her in the Bible that *Mordecai* was only *Esther's* uncle. Charley went away radiant with hope and devising stage business for *Mordecai* that should be the limit of avuncular affection, while Mrs. Hornbaker comfortably reflected that Mr. Moots, from being Laura's attendant at the rehearsals, had graduated into the chorus. He could keep an eye on things, and besides, she was going to marry him in the month.

Laura never looked at the doctor during the rehearsals, although they had to stand side by side to sing their duets. Once she dropped her score, and as he picked it up and gave it to her their hands touched. Both of them lost their breath control for a few bars.

The men hired their costumes from Columbus; the girls made their own. Abel Horn being so short, a deep tuck had to be taken all around in his robe. The first dress rehearsal he had to go around holding his gown up in front of him, so that he should not step on it. When he let go of it to hold up both hands to salute the king, it looked as if he were play-

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ing "Ring-around a-rosy, squat upon a posy." Mr. Moots had a long yellow robe with wide sleeves, and a tall, peaked hat, with a turban wound round it. It troubled Laura's conscience that she could not look at him without wanting to laugh. He was to be her husband in three weeks, and a wife ought to respect her husband, but still——

She and *Mordecai* had to act out their parts that night. She had dreaded it, but when he came on in his somber robes and flowing gray beard, carrying his long staff and looking so majestic, he seemed quite another person.

"Now you stroke her hair," said Charley Pope. "Tum-ty-tum. Now you kiss her forehead." The chorus giggled hysterically. Rat-tat-tat! went Charley's stick. "Ladies and gentlemen of the chorus will please preserve order. A leetle—a leetle *more* so, doctor," said Charley. "Now again, please. That's better. That's good. Now the look, Miss Hornbaker. Ah, that's elegant. Now: 'Go thou unto the king.' Your cue, doctor."

The chorus applauded the acting. They did not sense the tempest that swept over the two. Maddened by the contact of her bare arms, Dr. Avery forgot himself. The chorus could not hear him mutter: "I love you! I love you! O my God, how I love you!" nor feel the thrill of passion that quivered in his hand as it passed over her streaming

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hair. But she did. For them the look she turned on *Mordecai* was but simulation; for her, it was—oh, what ineffable longing!

Her conscience made her more than commonly gracious to Mr. Moots as they walked home that night. The red blood burned her face when she recalled the rehearsal. But she lingered over it in spite of herself. Still, when she met Dr. Avery in the street next day and bowed to him—she could do no less—she passed on, though she could see that he made as if to stop, and she felt in her back that he had turned to look after her. She dreaded the first performance, and yet she longed for it, longed to thrill under the touch of his hand on her hair. Would he say again—but, no, no, she must not think of that.

IV

Melodeon Hall was on the third floor. The tiny dressing rooms off the wings were enough for only a few of the principals. The others had to dress with the chorus in the rooms on the second floor, ladies in Judge Rodehaver's law office, men in Henry Miller's. The hall between had a front stair on Columbus Street and a back stair, leading up to the stage from Mad River Street. The offices were locked up before the performance so nobody could get in to steal the street clothes.

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Of the production of the *Logan County Republican* said: " We predict a glowing future for Minuča Center's talented young cantatrice, Miss Laura Hornbaker, who took the part of *Esther*. She was indeed queenly in her every act and move and added to her personal charms that of a loud and beautiful voice which has been trained for three terms by our esteemed fellow-townsman, Prof. Vincent Minetti, the accomplished organist of St. Bridget's R. C. Church."

The *Examiner*, which came out one day later, and ought to have had the news feature of the production, but didn't, said: " Miss Laura Hornbaker, who assumed the rôle of *Queen Esther*, sang the *morceaux* allotted to her with sweetness and with power. Her *staccato* passages were given with great purity and clearness, and both the *coloratura* and the *legato* movements were worthy of her excellent *maestro*, a true exponent of the old Italian school of *bel canto*; we refer to our genial fellow-townsman, Prof. Vincent Minetti, the accomplished organist of St. Bridget's R. C. Church. Miss Hornbaker was especially fine in the scenes with *Mordecai*, ably portrayed by Dr. George P. Avery."

Hannigan wrote that himself. When he went down with Professor Minetti to Slattery's between the acts he was already at the stage where the English language seemed to him utterly inadequate as

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a means of expression. Minetti filled him up with musical phrases and other things, and this may explain how the news feature got nothing except this: "But for the unfortunate *contretemps* on the concluding evening, the whole event reflected great credit on the musical abilities of our home talent."

The morning after the first night Mr. and Mrs. Hornbaker had meant to let Laura sleep late, but when the postman brought the letter announcing that at last the pension had been granted with back pay amounting to $2,600, they had to waken her and tell her the good news.

"O Laura! The house is saved! the house is saved!" cried Mrs. Hornbaker, the tears running down her face. "And your pa can pay off Rosenthal now. Oh! I am so happy!"

"The house is saved, anyhow, isn't it?" asked Laura, still a little dull with sleep.

"I mean if anything should happen."

If anything should happen——

Mr. Hornbaker could not speak. He was choked with a throng of emotions. He sat on the bedside. Suddenly he got up and walked the floor. Yes, he was an old man now. He had always made a living for himself and his family, and looked down on the deadbeats that lived off charity. But he was one of them himself now. A vague uneasiness came over him, a feeling that he had not done right by Laura in

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some way. He looked at her and saw how thoughtful she had suddenly become, how little jubilant over the success of her efforts.

"I expect we better let Laura rest, mother. She's pretty well tuckered. We got lots of time to talk this thing over."

Laura did not sleep. She lay staring at the ceiling. If she had only waited then she needn't have sold herself. Yes, that was what it was, just as George said, regular bargain and sale to the highest bidder. She had made the agreement and she supposed she would have to keep her word. And yet——

She recalled the performance of the night before. As she kneeled at his feet with her hair let down, she had thrilled at the touch of his hand; she had waited to hear those passionate words, "I love you! O my God! how I love you!" but Avery had himself better in hand, and all the people were looking. And then she knew how her heart hungered to hear them. If she could only see him to talk to him; to tell him how she had always loved him, but he had not asked her; tell him about the mortgage and how Mr. Moots had put them under obligations— Oh, if she could only back out of it now— Collections were better now, her father said, and it might be so that George could— Suppose he did ask her, what should she say? Her face burned at the thought.

All that day she was hardly herself. Her mother

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said: "You better go out for a walk, Laura. You're not looking very peart. I'm glad to-night's the last of this staying up late and singing so much." Laura said "Yes," but she wished it might go on forever, if only for the chance that once again she might hear him whisper, "I love you!"

She could not help herself, it seemed as if she had to walk through Center Street past the doctor's office. She was ashamed that she should show she cared so much for a man. What would people say if they knew? What would Mr. Moots say? And poor little Luella? Even now she was calling Laura "my new mamma." Rebellion rose in her heart. She didn't care! She couldn't be sacrificing herself to other folks' young ones when she might—she turned around quickly to see if anybody had overheard her secret imaginings.

She tried not to seem to linger as she looked at the gold letters on the black sign. It seemed to her that Avery was the most beautiful name in the whole world. She tried to herself how "Mrs. Laura Avery" would sound. Then she tried "Mrs. Laura Moots." Brrrr!

Eternity ended at last, and once more the time was evening; the place, Melodeon Hall.-Once more the piano jingled on the yon side of the canvas wall, which presently rose and disclosed the line of fire and the misty faces beyond it. Once more *Haman*

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strutted along with his retainers and hated *Mordecai* sitting in the gate. Once more the Jews, blinking in the bright light, bewailed Israel's low estate. Once again she kneeled at *Mordecai's* feet, and he stroked her hair and bade her go unto the king and make supplication for her people, defying all conventionalities. Once again she protested the danger, and still *Mordecai* insisted that it was her duty. The lines, "I'll go unto the king, though not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish," took on a new significance, personal, present.

Between the acts the little stage hummed like a hive with the laughter of the ancient Jews and Persians. Abel Horn was declaiming against the injustice of Charley Pope, Josh Riddle, the stage manager, was bossing the job of moving the throne, all the boys and girls rattling away for the bare life. In this Babel, Laura and George suddenly met face to face. It was as if a solitude surrounded them. He gazed at her fixedly. She opened her mouth to speak. The words stuck in her throat till she drove them out. She must tell him.

"George," she said and stopped, scared at herself. What if he should not extend to her the golden scepter? He took both her hands in his.

"It was true, what you said I was——"

"O my darling, I was crazy—I—I—but I did love you so, I do love you so!"

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She drew in a long, quivering breath. "I want to say," she persisted as if it were a task she had set herself, "I want to say that—it sounds so bold, but I must say it. 'If I perish, I perish,'" she quoted with a little smile. "It wasn't because I didn't—didn't like you. I always—but we were so worried about the house, and—Mr. Moots bought the mortgage, but we've got the pension now, and if you'll forgive me——"

"O Laura!"

"Wait." She eluded the arm that sought to embrace her. "And you never asked me——"

"I ask you now. Will you marry me?"

She inclined her head. "Don't, George," she whispered the second after. "They'll see you." Much he cared.

"When shall it be? To-night?"

"Oh, no, oh, no! I couldn't get ready."

"Just excuse me for a moment." With masculine masterfulness, he left her and whispered to an ancient Persian: "Billy! Jump into your street clothes and run over to Tom Moran's, the county clerk, and get a marriage license. Who for? For me and Miss Hornbaker. I'm twenty-eight and she's twenty-four. Here's a dollar. And say. See if Elder Drown's at home. Keep still about it. Skip now. O Laura! you make me the happiest man on earth."

"All down for the third act!" cried Josh Riddle,

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and they could only clasp hands and murmur, "After the show."

Billy Reinhart meant to keep still as he was bid, and he only told one man in the strictest confidence, but presently the whole company buzzed with the news except two. Moots for obvious reasons was not told, and Abel Horn was notorious for not keeping a secret. The others hushed when he came near, but he finally cornered one man and said: "Look here, there's a hen on. What is it? Something about Doc Avery and Laura Hornbaker, isn't it? Goin' to run off and get married, ain't they? Gosh! Won't that s'prise old Moots! Where to? Canton, eh?" Any kind of a yarn would do to tell Abel. "On the ten-thirty. Well, how's that? Sa-ay! Won't old Moots be crazy? Oh, sure not. Oh, I wouldn't let on for the world. Ain't it great, though!"

Everybody said it was the greatest possible mistake to let Abel Horn get even a hint of it. The secret gnawed him like a consuming fire. He could not keep away from Moots, who had begun to notice that people were either watching him closely or conspicuously avoiding him. What was this grinning ape of an Abel Horn tagging him about for? What was up? Where was Laura? Where was Doc——

"Oh, they've skipped, they've skipped!" crowed Abel Horn, who could not hold in any longer, being

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a small cup and soon filled. "They flew the coop! Off for Canton on the ten-thirty! Tra-la-loo!" and he waggled his hand as if "shaking a day-day."

After him buying that mortgage for her sake! He had ten minutes to get to the B. & I. depot. He might catch the fugitives yet. As he clattered down the back stairs to the men's dressing room for his street clothes only to find the door locked, Billy Reinhart, who was on the lookout, whispered, "Chur-roo! Here he comes!"

They fled down the front stair. There was Charley Wells' *coupé* across the road. Why wait till after the show?

"To Elder Drown's!" commanded George. "Drive like hell!"

Queen Esther never blanched at the bad word. As they rattled up Columbus Street to the minister's, Amzi Moots was holding up his yellow skirts and making for the ten-thirty as hard as he could pelt.

. . . . . .

Over and over again Charley Pope played the curtain cue of the fifth act and wondered what was the matter. The audience began to stamp. Josh Riddle appeared before the curtain and in the sudden hush was heard with painful distinctness. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "owing to an—to an—Aw, be still, can't you? It ain't either an accident,"

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he muttered to some one behind the curtain trying to prompt him, Abel Horn, of course, "owing to an——"

"Ufforshnit cong-tong!" shouted Hannigan from the fourth row back. "Ufforshnit cong-tong. Ai' that it? Huh? Thass whash mean, ain' it? Huh?"

"Oh, dry up!" the people next him said. "We want to hear."

"Ufforshnit cong-tong, ain't it, Josh? I leave it to you, Josh. Ain' it?" half rising from his seat. "Huh? Eh, Josh? Say! sa-ay! Them clothes o' yourn——"

"Down in front! Down in front! Shish!" came from all parts of the hall, and Professor Minetti took hold of the coat tails of the gifted Hannigan and pulled him down.

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Hannigan, whether it's that there whatyoumaycallum or not," laughed Josh. (Nothing ever feazed that man. Poor fellow! He's dead now.) "But it ain't exactly unfortunate. Ladies and gentlemen, we shall be obliged to ask your kind indulgence for the last act of the cantata, and Professor Pope will kindly omit the solo numbers of *Mordecai* and *Esther*, for the reason, ladies and gentlemen—for the reason—get out of the way, Abel" —he was arranging the curtain for a quick exit— "that they have RUN AWAY TO GET MARRIED! Let her go, professor." He bowed himself

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off in a storm of applause that drowned Charley Pope's loudest tinkle on the old piano.

"Ufforshnit cong-tong, jis' same," suspired Hannigan, his chin sunk in his shirt front.

Just as Elder Drown shut the book and leaned over to kiss the bride, a wild hooting arose from outside. Through the window they beheld Constable Halloran struggling with something in a yellow robe and a tall peaked hat that clung to the elder's gate post. A mob of boys from across the tracks squealed like a hog-killing, but through it all could be heard Constable Halloran's bellow: "Ye'll do nahthing of the kind. Ye'll go wit' me paceably to the callyboose or I'll break the face of ye, ye yallow lunatic!"

George laughed gleefully, but Mrs. Avery—Mrs. Avery sighed and said: "Poor little Luella!" George looked at her as if he did not understand.

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STARS IN HIS CROWN

WE had put down our name for Elder Breyfogle and his wife as our guests for the annual conference, and right glad we were when the 'bus drove up in front of the door and the elder got out in his linen duster, his thick stogy boots, wrinkled around the ankles, up which his trousers made undiscouraged efforts to climb, his rusty "plug" hat, and his Brussels carpet gripsack, bloated with clean shirts and collars and things.

He wouldn't hear to my paying Charley Wells for bringing him up, but laboriously unstrapped a leather pocketbook, clicking his porcelain "store teeth" together while his horny forefinger chased a smooth quarter into a corner whence it could flee no farther. That pocketbook! Never very plethoric, it was sure to go back home after conference reduced to incredible limpness by appeals for foreign and home missions, church extension, Freedmen's Aid Society, brethren in distress, and all the heart-stirring and heartrending pleas poured upon the favored that sit "within the pale of the conference."

"No. Sister Breyfogle felt as if she wouldn't be

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able to attend this conference," he sighed, as I took the gripsack from his hand and we went up the front walk and into the house. "No. She ain't sick jest now, although she has be'n porely all this last winter and part of the spring. The plumb facts of the matter is, Brother Billy, it has be'n borne in on me that I had orta take the superannuated relation, and while I'm resigned to the Lord's will, I d' know she is. Not that she's any ways rebellious, but I kind o' sispicion she thinks I'm tollable young to be givin' up the active exercise of my ministry, especially as they are others older'n me still a-continuin' on. And furthermore—m-well, I says to her, 'Mother,' I says, 'it seems to me you be'n a Methodist minister's wife long enough,' I says to her, 'to not expect riches. We have always got along,' I told her, 'by the Lord's help, and I have faith to believe His arm ain't shortened the least little mite,' I says to her. 'Well,' siss she, 'Jeremiah,' siss she, 'I think I'll stay at home and pray over it,' siss she. 'I don't believe but what I could kind of bear up under it better. It was under your preachin' in Hanks's schoolhouse,' siss she, 'that I first made up my mind to give my heart to God and my hand to the church, and your sermons have be'n a means of grace to me all these years,' she says, 'an' it jest seems to me I can't stand it to think o' you a not preachin' any more, but jest only exhortin',' and with that she

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began to cry, and I— Well, how air ye all, anyhow?" he broke off, with well-feigned cheerfulness.

"Sister Jackson, you're renewing your youth like the eagle. Laws, *no*! This ain't Jinny? W'y the last time I seen you, you wa'n't knee-high to a duck, and here you air a great big lady. Got 'ny beaux yet? Well, 'twon't be a great while now before yer maw and yer paw will be a-complainin' about you burnin' so much coal oil, the fellows is settin' up with you so constant."

He laughed so loud at his own joke that his upper set fell down, and "Jinny"—she is trying to get herself called "Virgie" now that she is sixteen, and we think sweet sixteen at that—went as red as the peonies out in the front yard.

"When she gets married, elder," her mother put in, "we'll have you to perform the ceremony."

"So do," said he, "so do. The fee'll come in mighty handy to a superannuated. Only don't be too long about it, 'r else you'll have to get somebody else. And look here, Jinny, don't you go to gittin' too stylish and have somebody to 'assist,' because that means splittin' the fee. Say"—he interrupted himself—"who d'you s'pose I married last Wednesday evening?"

"Anybody we know?"

"W'y, of course, er I wouldn't 'a' ast you. Nup. Not Em Shaw. Em's never goin' to git 'nybody. Too

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fond of saying smart things and too curless o' whuther they hurt or not. Well, I'll tell you. 'Twas Emmeline Shelby. She got a fellow by the name of Pearson. Not the Pearsons you know over by Sunbury, but Connecticut folks. His mother and sisters live with him and I jest tell you they're the salt of the earth. Oh, she's doin' well to git him. He's the superintendent of the trolley line. W'y, ye-es, bless your heart, we got a trolley line, too; they're as thick as fleas on a dog now. He gets good pay, and her pa deeded her a house and lot up on Fountain Avenue, all fixed up's fine's a fiddle. She's got everything that heart could wish, excepting—children." The old man's eyes twinkled, and he tugged at his long, square-cut beard, shaved away from his expressive mouth to give it room according to its strength. He made a grimace toward Virgie, who pretended not to notice his last sentence.

"Emmeline's a right good girl, though she's never pressed forward for the blessing of perfect love, like I expected she would. But in the prayer I offered after I had made her Mrs. Pearson, I asked the good Lord to make her the means of grace to her husband that she had be'n to her father.

"Well, sir, it jest about filled my cup to overflowing when I come to that part where it says: 'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?' to see Brother Shelby step up and say, 'I do,'

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a-lookin' so prosperous and jest as proud's a body kin righteously be of havin' sech a daughter. I felt so happy I come purty nigh shoutin', only you know, it was the Episcopal service and that don't make any allowance fer shoutin'.

"'Well,' I says to him when we set down to supper—and I want to say right here that Sister Breyfogle and me have be'n to a good many weddin's in the course of our earthly pilgrimage, but I do' know's we ever set down to a more bountiful repast. Laws, Brother Billy, if I could 'a' had some o' that good eatin' when I was a-tryin' to get my growth, I don't believe but what I'd be a bigger man than what I am— Well, I was a-goin' to tell you. I says to him, 'Brother Shelby,' I says, 'if that girl hain't be'n the Lord's angel to you,' I says, 'from the very day she was born,' I says, 'and you cross and disappointed because she wasn't a boy,' I says, 'then there never was any angels and I dassent deny them,' I says, 'because we got Scripture for them,' I says.

"Look like to me it wa'n't more'n a week sence I saw her standin' up on the seat a-holdin' onto his forefinger while he give in his first experience, that is, as fur's he'd got, and ast us all to pray for him that he might ever prove faithful. It was tollable airly fer revivals, summers along about Thanksgiving time it was, but his experience started one of

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the most powerful p'tracted meetings I most ever went through. We had a gracious outpouring of the spirit, and many precious souls were gathered in.

"Brother Shelby is as good as wheat now and a saved man. The Lord has prospered his goings out and his comings in, but they was a time when he was regular right down in the gutter, but the Lord snatched him out of it—took and drug him out, as you might say. He takes His own way—praise His name! but He gits there. The promise is: 'And a little child shall lead them,' and it's so, too.

"I married him and Huldy Kenyon, and I tell you I was mighty juberous about whether I had orta do it or not. The words kep' a-comin' into my head: 'Whom God hath joined together—whom God hath joined together—' 'Lord,' I says, 'air you a-joinin' them together er is it Huldy Kenyon's plegged stubbornness?'

"She was an awful pretty girl, and a good girl, too, and could 'a' had the pick o' the whole Lewiston circuit fer a good man, and who should she take up with but Ed Shelby? A wild, harum-scarum, drinkin', dancin', card-playin' sort of a feller, smart as tacks, but, dear me, how wild! She could 'a' had Henny Simmons as well as not, and he had a splendid farm, all in his own right, and would 'a' provided well fer her, but no, she was jest plumb dis-

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tracted after Ed Shelby. Have him she would, and have him she did.

"I says to her one time, 'Sister Huldy,' I says, 'do you feel called of the Lord to be yoked unequally with this unbeliever?' I says.

"'He ain't an unbeliever,' siss she, spunkin' right up. That's the way with these black-haired girls. Flare up like tow. Talk about the red heads. They're meek as Moses, 'longside o' the black heads. I marrid a red head myself, and I orta know.

"'He ain't an unbeliever,' she says. 'He don't come to church now, but he says he will when we get married.'

"'Well, Huldy,' I says as ca'm as I could, 'if he don't come now when he's still a-courtin' and ain't shore o' gittin' you, do you s'pose he will when they ain't no doubts about it?'

"She set her lips and tossed her head. 'He'll come,' siss she, and though I'm not a prophet or the son of a prophet, I could look ahead and see trouble and heartbreak fer her and contentions and strife fer him.

"'Well,' I says, 'I s'pose you know he's a drinkin' man,' I says, 'and you know what that means.'

"'He drinks some,' she owned up, gittin' as red as fire.

"'Some!' I says, and I tell you my heart bled fer her. 'Some! It's more'n some. He runs with them

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Allen boys and cuts up and carries on scandalous. Unless he turns to the Lord right quick,' I says, 'they are a heap o' trouble ahead o' him and you.'

"'Well,' siss she, 'I'm a-goin' to marry him, if he'll have me,' she says, as pert as you please. 'I'm a-goin' to marry him to reform him.' In them days that wasn't sech an old saying as it is now, but I had seen sech a plenty of it that I jest got heart-sick fer the pore girl. 'Well, Lord help!' I says, and hushed right up.

"I thought over it and thought over it, and, somehow, it was borne in on me that the Lord was goin' to join them together, if not by my hand, by some other's, and—m'well, I needed the fee right bad then anyhow. I disremember what it was that Sister Breyfogle wanted with it, but I married them and made them the subject of special prayer.

"What I said to Huldy, she must 'a' took to heart, for Ed come to meetin' right regular before they was married, but it turned out just as I thought, he kind of dropped off afterwards. He stayed sober as a judge fer quite a spell. Oh, I guess it must 'a' be'n nine or ten months before he broke out ag'in. I could see pride stickin' out all over Huldy, as much as to say, 'Didn't I tell you I could reform him?'

"I knowed it would be only a question of time, and, sure enough, when the bust-up did come, it was a terrible one. Horse run away with him, little

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bay mare she was, could go like the wind and nervous as a witch. Throwed him out about half a mile below Mumma's place. Broke his leg, he did. I happened along providentially and took him home in my buggy. I didn't want any of the neighbors to know about it, so I jest packed him into the house on my back. Pore Huldy, she was so't she couldn't do anything. I could lift a big man like him in them days, but I'm afraid it would be a little too much fer me now that I'm a-going to take the superannuated relation. The grasshopper is shore enough a burden now, jest like Scripture says.

"Poor Huldy cried, and took on terrible when she first see him, but she held herself in as soon as she smelled the liquor on his breath. She didn't want me to see that she was conquered. Oh, she was plucky! So I went for the doctor as soon as I could and then hunted up the little bay mare and what was left of Ed's buggy.

"He was laid up fer six weeks right in the middle of harvest, and had a big doctor bill and all. He was mighty penitent, and Huldy pitied him so much that she felt like stickin' up fer him more'n ever. I do' know as I blamed her much fer that. Little while after that, Emmeline was born, and I got right provoked at the man, the way he acted. You see, he wanted a boy the worst way, and went to town and got tight because it was a girl.

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"That annual conference, I was appointed to the Minuca Center charge, and I kind of lost sight of Ed and his wife, but I heard of them often. His farm got to runnin' down, as you might suppose, and on top of it all he had to get into a scrape when he was drunk, that cost him a pile of money to settle up. I don't know exactly what it was, but I know that he had to put a mortgage on his farm to pay it. But that didn't scare him, and he kep' on till finally he didn't come up with the interest, and then things began to look right doleful for Huldy. Course, she would never have admitted that she was sorry that she married Ed, p'ticularly as it was Henny Simmons that held the mortgage; but it kind o' looked to me as if the thought had poked its head in the door of her mind, as you might say, and that although she had ordered it out, it still kep' on hangin' around and peekin' in at the winder.

"I was three years at Minuca Center. You know that was before they let us stay five years in one appointment. The breaking up of the itineracy. Yes, sir, the breaking up of the itineracy. Well, I was made presiding elder of the Minuca Center district, and I tell you it jest about give me the all-overs when I saw Ed Shelby again, all so bloated up and his face as red as a comet. Tchk! I tried to talk to him, but though he was civil and all that, I could see that it was jest like pouring water on a duck's

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back fer all the good it done him. Huldy, she held her head up as well as she could, but she stayed away from meeting, and I surmised it was because she didn't have clothes fit fer her and little Emmeline. Sweet little young one, she was, and if ever they was a child jest naturally marked with love fer her pa, that child was. Seemed like she was all wrapped up in him, and he in her, too, fer all he was disappointed because she wasn't a boy. She was the very spit an' image of him and that's a compliment they ain't nobody can stand. They got to give in to that. A body'd think the sight o' her would 'a' kep' him away from whisky if anything could, but what Ed Shelby needed was saving grace, and plenty of it. It's to be had, bless God!

"First good chance I got, I drove out to the Shelbys'. Huldy was right smiley and churful, but her eyes was red, and it looked to me as if she was a-tryin' to carry it off bold and peart. But I looked her plumb in the eye an' I says: 'Huldy Shelby,' I says, 'you're in deep trouble. What is it? What's Ed been a-doin' now? I want you should tell me!' 'W'y, elder,' siss she, with a nice, easy laugh, 'nothin' p'tic'lar. What makes you run on Ed that away? They hain't a better man in Logan County than Ed Shelby, when—' She caught herself jist in time. 'Now, look here, Huldy Shelby,' I says, 'I don't want you to think I'm a-runnin' on Ed, because I

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ain't,' I says. 'They's the makin's of a good man in him. I feel the burden of souls with regard to him,' I says, 'and I know and you know that he's a-goin' to perdition as fast as the wheels of time can carry him. I know you love him so that you'd ruther go to the bad place with him than be up in heaven, you and Emmeline, and look down fer all eternity and see him in torment without one drop of water to cool his parched tongue,' I told her. 'I'm responsible, under God, fer you both,' I says, 'fer I married you. What'll I say when the Lord asks me what I done with them two precious souls fer whom Christ died? I want you to tell me all about it.'

"Well, sir, she busted right out a-cryin'. I let her have her cry out and when she had kind of ca'med down a little she up and told me how he'd be'n a-drinkin' so steady and so much that his nerves was all unstrung, and he couldn't sleep none at all, er at least, none to speak of, and his appetite was all gone, and how he was so ashamed of himself and the way he'd be'n a-actin' and so sick and tired of fallin' so many times and him a-tryin' so hard, all in his own 'stren'th and not a-leanin' on Him who is mighty to saye to the uttermost—Praise His name! Oh, glory to God fer full salvation—and how he'd set there and argue with her by the hour that it was his duty to go and make an end of himself,

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and how she would talk to him and try to persuade him out of it, and to try once more to reform and call upon the Lord to help him, and how if he was gone, the farm was sure to be taken away from them, and then what would become of her and little Emmeline, and fer him not to talk that away before other people er they would think strange of it, and how she jist couldn't live if he was to be taken away, and how pitiful it would be fer little Emmeline to be pointed out by everybody: 'That's the little girl that her father killed himself,' and how bad *his* folks would feel. Oh, I don't know what all she didn't tell me. She jest opened her heart to me, and I know it done her good to tell it to somebody.

"Well, I see right plain that this wa'n't no case fer counsel ner advice. It called fer help from on high. So we knelt down and had a word of prayer. I was real plain spoken with the Lord. I said to Him plump and plain: 'Lord, you've just *got* to do something fer Ed Shelby. I claim the promises fer him. Do something. I don't cur what it is, so long as it brings him to call upon Thee.' Well, sir, we both got up from our knees, sure I know that He heard us.

"Long about Thanksgiving time—I think it was the Sunday before. Yes, I know it was now—long about Thanksgiving time, I got around to Lewiston again for quarterly meeting. I was jest getting

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up to give out the hymn, when who should walk in but Brother and Sister Shelby, a-leadin' little Emmeline. They took a seat away up forward, and I never saw Ed Shelby look so much like a saved man as he did that morning. His eye was clur, and his face said 'Salvation' in every line of it. Huldy was jist a-beamin', and I felt sure, if I never did before, that there was a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God. Hallelujah! I noticed, too, that he didn't jist bow forward on the seat, come prayer time. Billy, I do despise that. No, sir, he got down on his knees with his face to the back of the seat he was in, in the good, old-fashioned Methodist way, like a man should that's put all upon the altar. I was so anxious to hear all about it that I could hardly keep in. I was a-goin' to preach a doctrinal sermon that morning against the Babtists, showin' how if the Israelites was babtized to Him in a cloud, they must 'a' be'n sprinkled, fer they couldn't 'a' be'n dipped, that is, so's to get 'em wet all over, but I jest let that go by the board and preached on the Prodigal Son and how there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. I had a message from the Lord that morning, and I delivered it straight at Ed Shelby, and I could see him a-gettin' so happy he didn't know what to do, and not havin' much experience with the ways of meet-

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inghouses, he didn't know any better than to holler 'Hooray!' when he meant 'Hallelujah!'

"As soon as I got through with the sermon, I wanted to hear what the Lord had done fer his soul, so I announced that there would be a sort of preliminary love feast, so as to get het up for the one in the afternoon. Sister Breyfogle shook her head at me, fer we was to take dinner at the Curls' and Sister Curl was very particular about having dinner on time. She was another Martha, curful and troubled about many things. Gone to glory now these twenty years, and I'll bet she's the neatest-looking angel there. I never let on I see Sister Breyfogle shake her head at me. I went right ahead. 'The dinner may get cold,' I says, 'brethren and sisters, and especially sisters, but I feel that the Lord is present with us, and that to bless, and He'll warm our hearts so's to make up fer the cold dinners,' I says. Old Brother Littell—he's gone to his rest, too, but do you mind how he could shout, Billy? He let out an 'A-*a*-A-Amen!' that you could hear from here to the courthouse, and Brother Ed Shelby stood up on his feet, the first one, all of a trimble, as I could see, and a-holdin' onto the back of the seat in front of him. Just then Brother Darrow started up, 'Hn-I've 'listed din the howly mwar, battling for the Lord!' You mind how he used to sing through his nose—and Ed had it in his mind

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to set down, but no, sir, he stuck it out. And there stood little Emmeline on the seat beside him, holding onto his forefinger with her little hand, the Lord bless the child!

"Well, he told us all about what a sinner he had be'n, and how he had fooled away his youth and stren'th and brought trouble and heaviness on his pore old mother and his faithful wife, and all the time he was talkin' I could see him as he was when he was an innocent boy, so clur-eyed and strong and her such a hearty girl that orta never had a day's trouble if it hadn't of be'n fer him, and looked at them both, and seen how whisky had brought him low, and wore her to a shadow of her former self, and I says to myself, 'If the devil ain't in whisky, what makes it do so much harm?'

"'It jest come to that pass,' says Brother Shelby, 'that I knowed I couldn't get shut of this Rum Demon by my own stren'th, and I didn't think they was any power that could help me. I jest knowed it would be one trouble after another, and me a-sinkin' lower and lower and a-draggin' my pore wife and innocent child after me. So I made up my mind,' he says, 'that I'd end it all. I'd resk an eternity of hell fer myself if only my wife and little girl could have peace and comfort here on earth a spell. I got down my razor last Wednesday morning, and made out I was goin' to shave myself. I honed it and

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honed it, till I got it as sharp as I could, and all the time I was thinkin' how this was the last time and me wantin' to say good-by to them, but not dastin' to fer fear my wife would sispicion what I was up to. Finally,' says he, 'I slipped out o' the house and over to the woods back of the barn. I got out o' sight of everybody——'

"'Not God's,' put in Brother Darrow.

"'No, sir,' says Brother Shelby, and sech a clamor of hallelujahs you never heard. 'I set down on a log to cut my throat. I thought,' said he, 'of how 'twould be when Huldy missed me, and begun to holler fer me, and git the neighbors to search fer me, and I thought,' said he, 'of them a-findin' me a-layin' behind that log on them wet leaves, all in a puddle of my own blood, and it made the cold chills come over me,' he says. But it seems like he was determined to do it.

"Then he went on to tell how it come across his mind about Abraham a-sacrificin' Isaac, and the picture about it in the big pictorial Bible of the angel a-reachin' down his hand to hold back Abraham's knife, and how he jest thought, 'Huh! The Lord won't bother His head enough about me to send no angel,' and drawed his razor and jest as it nicked his skin he felt a hand holding him back, and he turned, scared like and half expecting to see the silver feathers of an angel's wing.

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"'It was little Emmeline here,' he says, 'that had follered me out and ast me: "Pa, whutch you goin' to do?" but she was jest as truly the Almighty's messenger as if she had come right straight on her ernt from the Great White Throne.'"

The elder sat silent for a few seconds softly patting his hands together with such a look on his face as they must have who behold the Beatific Vision of the King in His glory. Then he heaved a long sigh. "Yes," he said, at length, "I'm a-goin' to apply for the superannuated relation. I'm getting along in years now, and they want younger men and men that's better educated than what I am. I've borne the burden and the heat of the day, and though I have been an unprofitable servant, I have gathered in some sheaves for the Lord of the Harvest when He comes. . . . It won't be long now."

THE END

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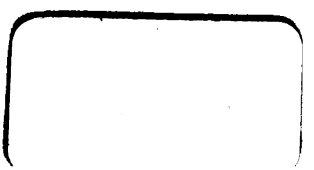

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